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John Bell, from Scotland, is a member of the Iona Community. He is a liturgist, preacher, and collector and composer of church music. His work takes him frequently to Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. He is well known in North America from numerous speaking tours and musical compositions published by GIA.



June 22–26, 2015

The Curse of Literacy: Most Christians in every age have either been unable to read scripture or have not had access to a Bible. Yet these people have much to teach us about scriptural literacy.

Retell Me the Old, Old Story: Some of the most familiar biblical texts fail to excite, incite or bless us because the way they've been commonly read and expounded owes much to the cultural norms of a previous era.

Missing Women: Finding a monogamous Jewish patriarch requires almost as much work as finding a virtuous woman in the Hebrew scriptures. Why is this and can the situation be redeemed?

The Importance of the Imagination: The imagination is sometimes seen as the bogus gift of the Holy Spirit. Without it, our understanding of scripture will most certainly be diminished.

What Shall We Tell the Children? Are there other pertinent scriptures to teach young people besides Moses in the bulrushes, Daniel in the lion's den, and the Baby Jesus asleep in the hay?

Christmas truce

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

THE WORDS STRIKE deeply in our hearts whether recited by a child, sung by a choir, or inscribed on a greeting card. Yet peace on earth and goodwill among humans is remote. In fact, it sometimes seems that hoping for peace, expecting peace, and praying for peace is a hopeless human project.

This year marked the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. As the first mechanized war, its cost in human life was enormous and horrifying. It was to have been "the war to end all wars," but the height of tragic irony is that it was merely a prelude to a greater, more lethal war, followed by uninterrupted violence, suffering, and tragedy in the next century. Are we naive to keep talking about and hoping and praying for peace?

The Christmas truce of 1914 gave the world a glimpse of peace in a horrific time. On Christmas Eve of that year, two great armies faced each other across a front that extended along the French-Belgian border. Troops crouched in trenches cut into the soggy soil, with only candles, lanterns, and flashlights to give them light. It was a constant struggle to keep the mud walls from collapsing and the trenches from flooding.

Between the trenches was 50 to 100 yards of "no man's land." Snipers posted on each side had orders to shoot anything that moved in the opposite trench. Hand grenades were thrown, artillery shells lobbed, and occasionally soldiers charged up out of the trenches.

As Christmas approached, troops on both sides received packages from home. British troops received Princess Mary

Packets—cigarettes, a greeting card from King George V, an individual plum pudding, and Cadbury chocolates. A German package included tobacco and a pipe, a profile of Crown Prince Frederick Wilhelm, and sausages and beer. The German government also sent bundles of Christmas trees to the front.

On December 24 the shooting began to slow down and then stopped altogether. No orders were given. Combatants simply stopped shooting at one another. In the early evening British troops were startled to see Christmas trees with lighted candles on the parapets of the German trench. In one spot, a German voice called out: "A gift is coming now." The British dove for cover, expecting a grenade. What came across was a boot filled with sausages. The British troops responded by sending a plum pudding and a greeting card from the king.

Then singing started: patriotic and military songs at first, followed by applause from the opposite trench. Then, breaking an eerie silence, the Germans sang "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht," and the British joined in, all up and down the front, on "Silent Night, Holy Night."

On Christmas Day opposing troops ventured out to extend greetings, awkward handshakes, and small gifts. In several places soccer games were played.

After a week or so the shooting resumed, and there were 6,000 deaths each day for the next 46 months.

Stanley Weintraub recounts this incident in *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce*. He reflects: "The Christmas Truce has lingered strikingly in the memory . . . [it] remains a potent symbol of stubborn humanity within us."

The Christmas truce is almost too good to be true, and yet it is no more unrealistic than the angel announcing that a newborn baby is the Savior. And it is no more naive than our faith that the birth means that peace is always possible, and even close at hand.

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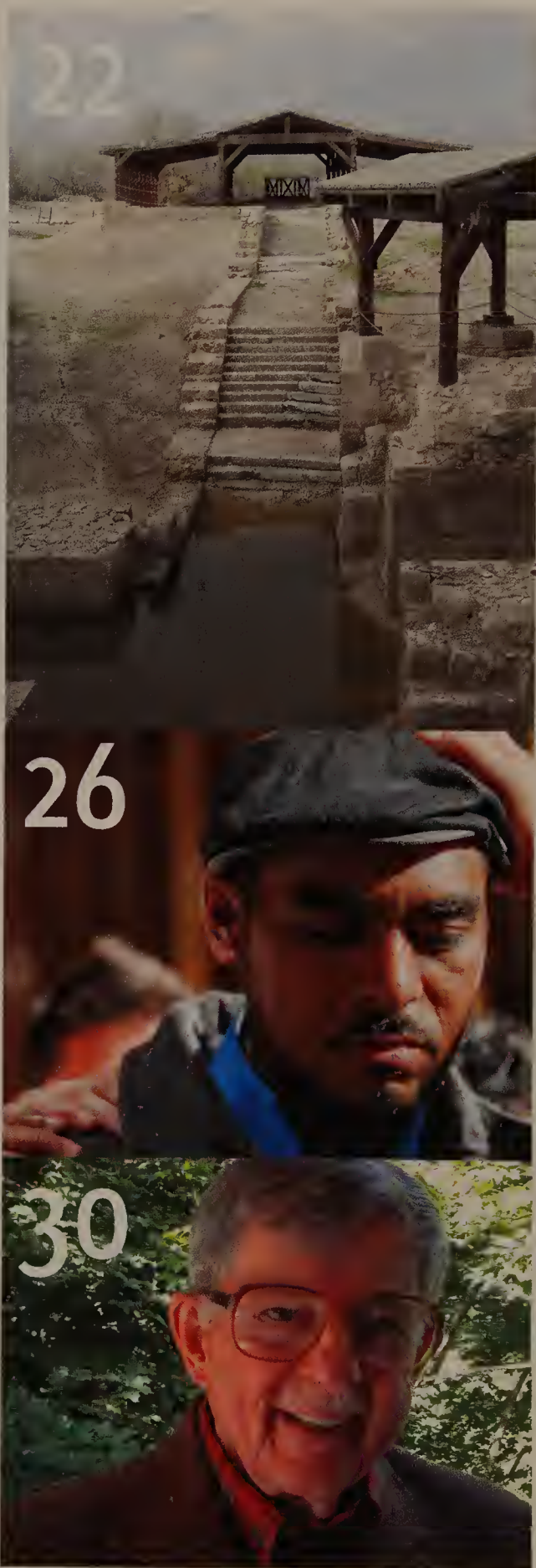
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The CHRISTIAN CENTURY, (ISSN 0009-5281) is published biweekly at 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago IL 60603. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Product (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1406523. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers NY 10920-0429.



Dressed for the moment

I resonated with Samuel Wells's article on the clerical collar ("Dressed for the moment," Nov. 26). I'm a member of an Episcopal Church nonresidential religious community (Community of the Gospel), and we wear our habits mostly, if at all, in religious settings. We are suspicious of "habit wearing" and worry that it feeds into "playing monk" or working out ego issues.

This article invites us to be less suspicious of the habit. It can be an expression of monastic hospitality in a hurting world. The habited monastic is saying: you can talk to me about the deepest things, the pains and joys of life, safely. My habit says welcome to an alternative space where rules of graciousness, hospitality, and safety prevail.

Dan Hoffman

christiancentury.org comment

As a retired priest I always wear my collar when in a pastoral situation for the reason Wells suggests—to show my availability as a priest. It seems the least I can do in the service of God and the church for anyone who might be in need.

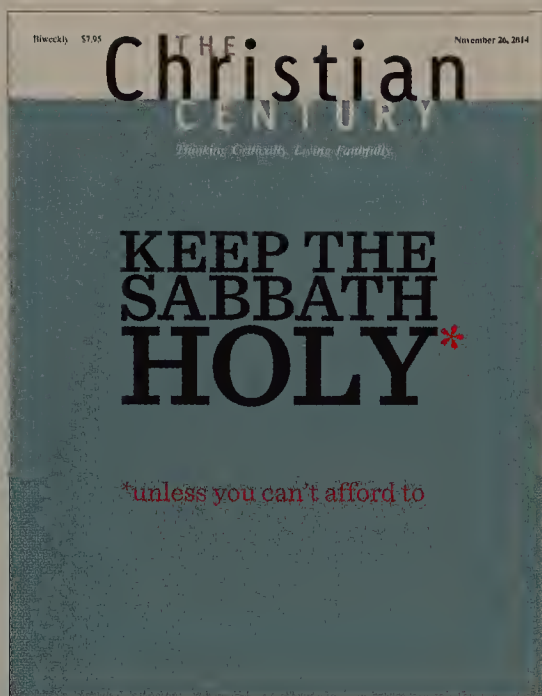
Ronnie Smith

christiancentury.org comment

Of course Wells could have heard the bus driver's confession. Anyone is empowered to do that according to the Book of Common Prayer. And while he could not have offered God's absolution as a priest or bishop could, he could have used the slightly altered form of absolution that a deacon or layperson is allowed to offer. I suspect the bus driver wouldn't have known the difference and would have been grateful and relieved that Wells offered him pastoral care. Maybe it's not the collar that's the impediment, but the understanding of ministry.

Peter Faass

christiancentury.org comment



Love your neighbor . . .

It scares me when anyone's theology of relationships strays in any way from *agape* ("Bonds of affection," Nov. 26). Scott Bader-Saye points out how difficult it is for church members to tolerate one another, let alone show love. He is right about that, but wrong in proposing *storge* as a solution. Affection based on familiarity is a good thing, but it's not the solution for the deep problems encountered when humans try to have a life together. What works there is the self-sacrificial love that comes only through the grace of God and that is mediated through the cross of Christ.

This love, as theologian Anders Nygren has said, reveals our aspiration to a higher life as foolishness and shows that the wisdom of God has ordained that the higher life is pure gift to the brokenhearted and meek. The solution to what it takes "to hold people together despite disagreements and difference" may include the affection of a shared life, but we will survive only when we yield our spirit to God's Spirit, enabling us to love even the intimate enemies seated in nearby pews.

David Doreau

Waterville, Me.

Ministry in transit . . .

I enjoyed G. Travis Norvell's article on riding his bike to work ("Pastor on two wheels," Nov. 26). At various times in my ministry I had a moped and a bike but used them sporadically, not with Norvell's intentionality. Now fully retired in Los Angeles, I ride the bus and rail systems primarily as a hobby and meet a world that's otherwise out of my sight.

Tom Eggebeen

christiancentury.org comment

Critical conversations . . .

How we die is part of our legacy to our families and communities ("Dying wishes," by Jennifer L. Hollis, Nov. 12). Most Americans hope that as they near the end of their lives they won't be a burden to their families and friends. Yet if we avoid having conversations about our hopes and wishes for care at the end of our lives, we may be leaving people in the dark. This omission may result in strife at the bedside and cause lasting damage to the relationships between people we love the most, something clergy witness too often in the ICU and elsewhere.

The difference between a "good" death and a "hard" one may be a conversation, according to the Conversation Project founder and journalist Ellen Goodman. (The Conversation Project offers a free kit on its website to support people in expressing their wishes for care through the end of life.)

The faith community is uniquely poised to prepare people to cultivate the spiritual maturity needed to face mortality and talk with loved ones and health-care providers about end-of-life wishes. I urge them to start those conversations now.

Rosemary Lloyd

Lincoln, Mass.

December 24, 2014

Don't shoot

The police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, revealed a stark racial and social divide: millions of African Americans can easily imagine themselves or a loved one as the unarmed person being fired upon by police, whereas few whites can. That reality is finally more significant than the ambiguous details of what happened in Brown's fatal 90-second encounter with police officer Darren Wilson. For black Americans, the abuse of power by police is a familiar pattern, not an aberration—and it is that reality that must be acknowledged and addressed.

In one of many powerful confessions evoked by the shooting, Jonathan Capehart of the *Washington Post* recalled how his mother used to tell him “not to run in public, lest I arouse undue suspicion. How I most definitely should not run with anything in my hands, lest anyone think I stole something. The lesson included not talking back to the police, lest you give them a reason to take you to jail—or worse. And I was taught to never, ever leave home without identification.” What white children are given such instructions?

According to one poll, 45 percent of African Americans believe they have been discriminated against by the police because of their race, compared to only 7 percent of whites. Blacks are in fact much more likely to be arrested for drug use, for example, than are whites found engaged in the same activities. Even 31 percent of whites, the poll found, believe that police are more likely to use deadly force against blacks. The tensions created by such disparities are exacerbated when—as is the case in Ferguson and many cities—the police force is overwhelmingly white and the population predominantly black.

Unlike the issue of voting rights, the racial disparities in law enforcement cannot be addressed by enacting one or even a series of laws. But reforms can be made.

The city of Ferguson has already announced that it will take some significant steps. It will create a citizen advisory board to review police actions; it will encourage police officers to live in the city; and it will seek to hire more African Americans.

Requiring police to wear and use body cameras to record their interactions with the public—a measure the Obama administration is supporting—is a further way to bring transparency to police actions. The simple act of requiring an officer to wear a name badge can humanize encounters with police.

Beyond these steps lies the daily work by which officers get to know residents and business owners and build trust through the practice of openness, dependability, and fairness. That kind of policing serves the police in the end, because officers cannot succeed at their difficult and dangerous jobs if they do not have—and have not earned—the support of the community they serve.

For black Americans, abuse of police power is a familiar pattern.

VOICES of 2014

Sources: Cleveland Plain Dealer, National Catholic Reporter, New York Times, Reuters, RNS, The Week, Time, Washington Post

“Churches and other places of worship are intended to be sanctuaries—holy sites where people come to pray and to worship God. In this nation of ours, they have seldom been the locations where violence has disrupted the otherwise peaceful atmosphere. Yet even those occasions—rare as they may be—are not sufficient reasons to allow people to bring more weapons into God’s house.”

—Archbishop **Wilton Gregory** of Atlanta, announcing that he will not allow guns in Catholic churches under a new Georgia law

“We are a better people than what these laws represent, and it is time to discard them into the ash heap of history.”

—Federal judge **John E. Jones III**, striking down Pennsylvania’s ban on same-sex marriage

“It’s chaotic, really chaotic. People are not just worried and afraid, but they are really depressed about what will be the future, if there is a future.”

—Archbishop **Bashar Warda** of the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil in Iraq, speaking to Vatican Radio about the Sunni-led insurgency

“While the dire plight of Iraqi civilians should compel the international community to respond in some way, U.S. military action is not the answer . . .

There are better, more effective, more healthy and more humanizing ways to protect civilians and to engage this conflict.”

—**Letter to President Obama** signed by 53 religious leaders, academics, and ministers urging alternatives to U.S. military action in Iraq and Syria



“If you don’t look like Michael Brown, or have a son or grandson or cousin who looks like Michael Brown, you will never understand why we feel the way we feel tonight.”

—**Markel Hutchins**, an African-American minister in Atlanta protesting against the grand jury decision not to indict the police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, who shot the unarmed Michael Brown

“Violence isn’t the victim’s issue. It’s the abuser’s.”

—**Michelle Beadle**, host of ESPN’s *SportsNation*, after fellow anchor Stephen A. Smith warned women about provoking violent actions by males. He was commenting on the suspension of NFL player Ray Rice for domestic violence.

Rice was later reinstated.

“Tell me my origin story.”



“I was hungry. And you asked for my papers. I was thirsty. And you wanted to see my visa.’
Not what Jesus ever said.”

— A **church sign** at College Avenue Presbyterian Church in Oakland, California

“Who does the government work for? Does it work just for millionaires, just for the billionaires, just for those who have armies of lobbyists and lawyers, or does it work for the people?”

— **Elizabeth Warren**, Democratic senator from Massachusetts

“The people who work at Walmart cannot feed their families. The Waltons [Walmart owners] are on the list of the top ten richest Americans.”

— **Harriet Applegate**, head of the North Shore AFL-CIO Federation of Labor in Ohio during a Black Friday demonstration against Walmart’s treatment of its workers

“When contagion breaks out, fear invariably spreads faster than the virus. This isn’t reason to relax, but it is reason for a calm, deliberate focus on containment.”

— **USAToday.com**, commenting on the Ebola virus crisis in West Africa

“The formulators of the [Israeli] Declaration of Independence, with much wisdom, insisted the Arab communities in Israel, as well as other groups, should not feel as the Jews had felt in exile.”

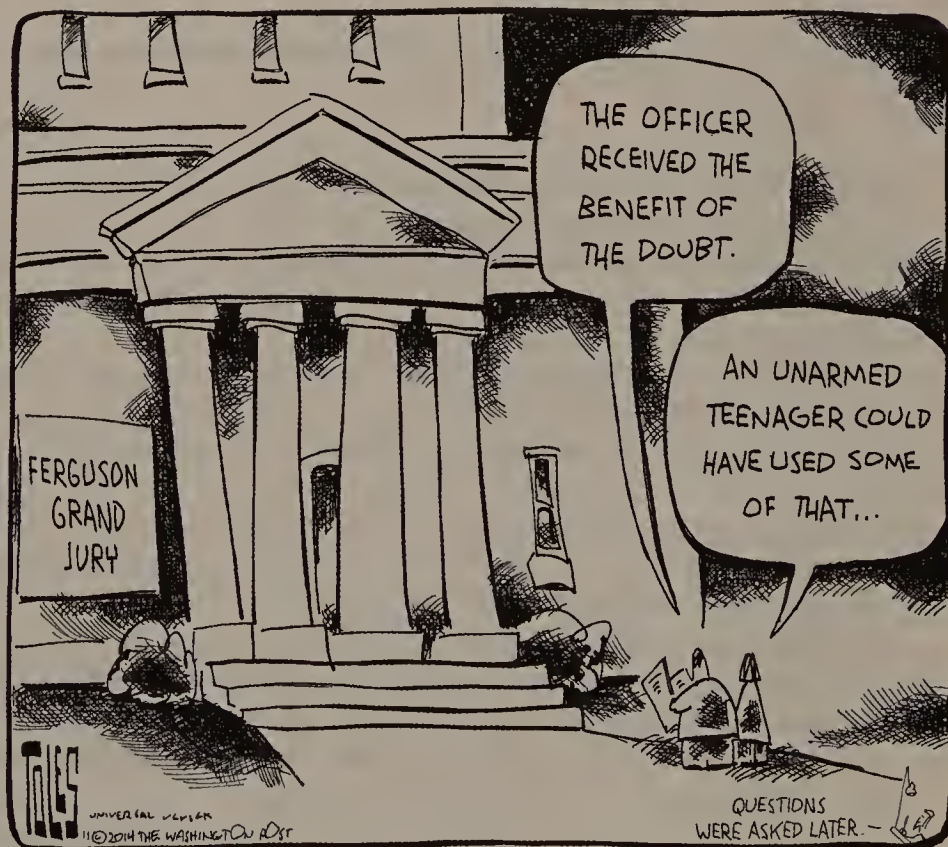
— Israeli president **Reuven Rivlin**, reacting to a bill promoted by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that would declare Israel the nation-state of the Jewish people

“Saving the planet would be cheap; it might even be free.”

— Economist **Paul Krugman**, commenting on several studies that conclude that strict carbon legislation wouldn’t hurt the economy but could actually help it by leading to faster growth through the investments in renewable energy

“How can humanity survive tomorrow when it is severed today by diverse divisions, conflicts and animosities, frequently even in the name of God?”

— Ecumenical **Patriarch Bartholomew**, leader of the Eastern Orthodox churches, in a joint session with Pope Francis during Francis’s November trip to Istanbul



The holy family didn't meet the ideal either

God among the imperfect

by Matt Fitzgerald

I DON'T KNOW what a perfect first-century family looked like, but I'm certain that Joseph and Mary didn't fit the ideal. Joseph had no money. He had no safe place for his wife to give birth and no plausible explanation for her pregnancy. How scared they must have been. Their family was turned upside down before it even began.

I know about unusual families. I come from one. There is a picture in one of my mother's photo albums of the day she and my stepfather were married. They are holding hands and looking pleased but also totally overwhelmed. Each had lost a spouse to cancer only 18 months before. Their kids are on either side of them—six teenagers with mouths stuffed full of braces, heads full of regrettable '80s hair, each one of them with a dead

look in his or her eyes. When I look at that picture and see my biological sister, my adopted sister, three step-siblings whom I didn't know, my stepfather, my mother and me, I don't see an ideal family. I see something quite unusual.

But in America "unusual" families are everywhere. In increasing numbers, African Americans marry whites, atheists marry Christians, and men marry men. Democrats marry Republicans. Good single friends join forces as part of the "voluntary kin" movement. We have blended families, same-sex families, adoptive families, and single parent families. That list is from a *New York Times* article, but it could be straight out of my church directory. Many of the families I serve don't fit the ideal.

I did see one ideal family recently. They were pictured on a Christmas card

that came in the mail. There was a father with a full head of close-cropped black hair, a mother with long blond tresses and an expensive-looking scarf, and four kids of varying ages, each one smiling perfectly, each in a tasteful holiday sweater, eyes peaceful, as if there were no place they'd rather be. All six were set against a holiday backdrop of snow-dusted trees atop a soft, rolling hill. Underneath their photo their name was printed: "The Bronnings."

I flinched. "Man, the Bronnings are really *something*. Why can't we ever get a family photograph that doesn't feature someone squinting? How did they get all those kids to wear wool sweaters? How big is that backyard?" All of which boiled down to: "Who are these perfect creeps?" I turned the card over. It was an advertisement for Shutterfly, a card and photo company.

The consumer (at least this consumer) often feels inadequate in comparison with the sparkling perfection of holiday advertising. I know Mr. Bronning is fake, but I still don't compare well . . . Perhaps a professionally shot, classy family Christmas card would help? I mean, maybe it would suggest to the world that my confused, anxious parenting is actually smooth and confident?

Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "He [man] arrives at the highest pitch of his perfection when he becomes suited to God through becoming absolutely nothing in himself." As long as I insist that I'm strong, nearly perfect, and able to make my own way, I'll hold God off at a distance. I don't need him. He's just a notion floating in the ether or a

So much

At year's end, when all is sad and done in,
we gasp as clouds of smoke appear.
But it's only the yews spewing pollen, outdoing
chimneys as if it were spring. That
and speech about Mideast peace as juncos
reseed themselves, the Christmas rose
flops open to cold, and Barney the cat
perfects his new trick—he unbars our door.

He stares.
(He prefers indoors.)
But right there's the morning star,
just like the chorale's. And up close, trouble—
a pup hunting kibble and warmth. And there's more. Mt. Rainier
shows up in pink and blue bunting. So clear. Such fresh-powder glory.
The sleepy volcano seems suddenly haloed, huge, and near. So much
for our little stable.

Muriel Nelson

Matt Fitzgerald is pastor of St. Pauls United Church of Christ in Chicago.

comfort arrested in the past. He isn't someone I desperately need to lean on or collapse into. If I insist that I'm making it on my own, I'll never become the person I was born to be. My perfection, whether real or as fake as a Christmas card ad, won't allow God to come into my life.

It's no coincidence that Christ was born into a shaky, uncertain family. God goes where he's needed.

The Bronnings' card and others like it try to mask our imperfections and create the fiction of perfect families. But it's only in accepting the fact that we can't ever get it right that our families stand a chance of discovering God's presence, God's care, God with us.

It's no coincidence that Christ was born into a shaky, uncertain family. God goes where he's needed. Joseph and Mary find themselves *trembling* on December 24, not thumping their sweater-clad chests in a family photo. Joseph and Mary are confused, baffled, needy—and then they

find God right in their laps. Right in the middle of their imperfection, as if their imperfection called out to him, "Come, we need you, come be born among us."

Is your family imperfect? Take heart. So was Christ's. In his humble family Christ learned to become humble. In his

imperfect family Christ learned to become merciful. That's what we do in our families. We hurt each other and then we forgive one another. Of course, families also introduce us to unearned love, but if it weren't for forgiveness, families would not be able to exist.

Karl Barth says that at Christmas God remains eternal majesty but also becomes a child, a brother, a family member here, among us. He comes to all of us who've ever lived in an imperfect family.

Even if your family managed to muster up the perfect Christmas card this year, you'll still need God's presence in your midst. All our families are broken. It may be the lucky families whose "imperfections" won't let them deny that fact. It is certainly the wise families who embrace it, who name it.

"O come, O come, Emmanuel, into all our holy families." CC

A busy pastor's spirituality

Prayer on the go

by Michael Lindvall

MY BROTHER-IN-LAW almost never goes to church, yet he's much more disciplined in his spirituality than I am. An addict nearly ten years into recovery, he begins every day with at least a half hour of reading and prayer. His copy of AA's *The Big Book* is crammed with margin notes written over the last decade. The first time I saw the book, it reminded me of my late grandfather's onionskin KJV New Testament, with a thousand little thoughts that he had lovingly penned into the margins.

If my brother-in-law and I are together, he invites me to read and pray with him in the morning. The readings from *The Big Book* and a smaller Nar-Anon volume are down-to-earth, almost gritty

in their spiritual honesty. My brother-in-law's prayers are honest and true—no whisper of pretense. He never misses a morning. The practice has changed his life.

I can hardly excuse my own spiritual ill discipline by telling myself that my minister life is more demanding than his lawyer life. It's not. I've occasionally tried to rise extra early in the morning and begin every day with 30 minutes of Bible study and prayer. But my resolve is soon sunk by late nights, early meetings, plain laziness, or all three. I have finally decided that although I have the highest regard for Benedictine monks who tithe the hours, I cannot do what they do. I'm not wired for a spiritual life shaped by a

segmented time of day set aside for scripture and prayer.

At the same time I've come to affirm that I do have a spiritual life. It's differently shaped, and though it appears ragged and lazy to some, it is ample and rewarding for me. Haphazard as it may be, it leads me into a life of fuller obedience to God. As it's woven into my workaday routine and not separate from it, it helps me to better live in love, justice, and compassion toward others.

I was once told that the worship leader cannot worship when he or she is leading worship. Somewhere, perhaps in

Michael Lindvall is pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in New York.

seminary, I was taught that preparing to lead a Bible study or preach a sermon did not count as Bible study for the one doing the preparation. I got the impression that leading prayer at committee meetings did not count either, or any of the spiritual matters I labored at *as a minister*. This effort was “professional” and not personal or spiritual. Realizing that this is untrue has brought me great relief and joy.

When I sit down to write a sermon on Friday morning, as is my routine, I pray before I read the passage I plan to preach about. I pray what the Reformed tradition would name a “prayer for illumination of the word.” Later, I pray at my word processor. In the early afternoon I pray as I pace my study struggling to imagine how I can tune this sermon to the ears of my congregation. I sometimes pray when the printer spits out the first draft. “Dear God, these words lie flat on paper; raise them up; transform them from ink into truth that matters.”

I pray early Sunday morning as I make final changes—nips and tucks,

sanding rough dependent clauses smooth. I pray as I read the thing over and over until I know it nearly by heart and labor with doubt. “Does this *really* make sense, Lindvall?” And then, just before the choir sings the introit and I find my place in the procession, I settle for a minute in the back pew and pray yet again that the Holy Spirit may bear

tion for the tired and empty preacher staring blankly at a blank computer monitor. Sometimes they become prayers of thanksgiving for some thought that falls into my head, some tale or wise word that threw itself across my path.

I’ve discovered that prayer imbedded into sermon preparation, prayer infused into committee work, and prayer insert-

Prayer embedded into my pastoral duties leads to a radically incarnational prayer life.

these mortal words of mine from lip to ear and make them something like the word of God to the congregation sitting in the pews in front of me.

These sermon-writing prayers often spill into pastoral prayers for individual members of my congregation whom I had in my imagination as I wrote, but who may or may not actually hear what I am struggling to say. Sometimes my Friday prayers become prayers of peti-

ed into hospital visits leads to a radically incarnational sort of prayer life—the warp of prayer woven into the weft of work, the spiritual infusing every fleshly hour of my often mundane duties as a pastor.

I’ve been relieved to find the same to be true of the study of scripture that I do in preparation for sermons and Bible studies. Every week I lead a men’s Bible study from 7:45 to 8:45—ten to 20 bankers, lawyers, and doctors, plus a former U.S. senator and a psychiatrist who’s a recognized expert on sociopathy.

I rise very early on Thursday and spend a couple of hours with the chapters we are studying that day. This is perhaps my lone act of real spiritual discipline. I begin the class with a quick walk through the text and raise some thoughts for discussion. The discussion is stunningly rich. These men see things that I would never see. They understand things I miss. And I see things they don’t. It becomes a journey into the heart of scripture that is changing all of our lives. And it’s doing this even though it’s a part of my job. The study of scripture as an integral, “professional and required” part of my work is one of the most transforming spiritual experiences of my personal life.

When I get out of bed in the morning, I often pray for the day ahead of me and the people I’ll spend time with. At night I pray for my family and the world, though I often fall asleep before I get out the amen. If I have no words, I say the ancient Jesus Prayer over and over.

Comeback for snowy plover

Associated Press headline, October 15, 1914

O lesser flake of feathers, O downy
shore-winged picker of cockles

and mites, twig-legged runner through ripples,
who was it called you out of extinction

to life and flirt again with the waves?
Who missed you enough to amend

your habitation? Who restored you,
winging you back to the beaches of our lives?

What urgent impulse then spirited you—
you in your dappled egg—to break shell,

chick stirring in shallow sand-scape,
lifting to fly the salt wind, rising in drifts

over wild surf, your pinions
riding the breath of God?

Luci Shaw

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner."

I also tuck prayer into odd moments of the days. I often go to yoga class with my older daughter—an experience that I don't find to be exactly "spiritual," although I do like the sound of two dozen people humming "om" harmonically. I do yoga mostly to stretch old muscles that no longer much want to be stretched. But

there is a lot of silence during yoga sessions, and I pray into the silence.

I also pray in taxicabs. Most trips are too bumpy and jerky to do anything on a Blackberry, so I pray, usually for the folks in my congregation, the ones I have ritually promised to "keep in my prayers." I also pray in the subway. I get queasy if I try to read, so I often pray for the strangers on the train with me. Some of them appear

burdened, others seem venal, and some are clearly mad. Sometimes I imagine that one of them is praying for me.

My spiritual discipline is provisional—the best I can do, and not really very good. But it is woven into my work as a pastor and my days as a harried New Yorker. Planted firmly in the dirt of the days, it makes me a marginally better Christian and human being. CC

The impossible possible

BY BRIAN DOYLE

WE HAD not one but two baptisms the other day, and while there were many moving and entertaining moments therein—for example, one moppet squalling steadily in the key of C throughout the entire ceremony, a remarkable operatic performance, and the other child, as round of visage as the later Orson Welles, sleeping through the entire ceremony, not even flickering awake when the tall priest marked her with oil and then poured water into her tiny black Mohawk haircut—what absorbed me after a while was the way little kids edged toward the event like avid eager wasps to a summer picnic.

Yes, the tall priest had welcomed the children up to the altar, booming out his baritone invitation and waving his arms like railroad crossing gates, and a few kids had shot up the aisle instantly like falcons with ponytails, and then a few more edged out from the wings of the church and sat down crosslegged and fascinated too, but it was the next few minutes that riveted me, for even as the priest went to work at the baptistery, and the parents and godparents stood there blinking and beaming, and several peo-

ple in the congregation hummed along with the kid wailing steadily in the key of C, and I realized that the other baby looked exactly like Joe Strummer when he had a Mohawk in the last year the Clash were great, little kids kept edging out of the pews, and sliding surreptitiously toward the altar, and crouching behind the pillars at either side of the nave, and peering out amazed and delighted as the two babies were oiled and washed in the waters of the Lord.

I watched one boy, maybe age four, slip out of his pew and plaster himself against the wall, looking uncannily like a tiny cat burglar, and slowly slide along the wall toward the altar, grinning at those of us who grinned at him. I bet it took him five minutes to go 20 pews along that wall, but the priest was being expansive and garrulous and relaxed about pacing, so by the time the priest got to the actual baptizing of the squaller and the sleeper, the cat burglar had achieved the end of the wall, near the pillar where I counted four kids crouched and wary and absorbed.

Most essays about baptisms would pause here to say something piercing about baptism, and how clans and tribes

have been christening their startled children in fresh clean water for a million years, and how gathering in community to bless a new being with prayer and laughter is a thing far bigger than the word *holy* can carry, and how what we mean by sacrament is so often exactly this sort of gathering to pray at a project launch, but I want to stay with the little kids running and tiptoeing and sneaking up on the sacred, and watching with awe, crouched behind the pillars, sitting crosslegged on the steps of the altar, and plastered to the wall where it ends near the chancel.

We all sprint or tiptoe toward the sacred, thrilled and hesitant and awed and skeptical, but unable to sustain cynicism or denial, for we know somehow somewhere deep inside that yes, there *is* sacred, and yes, there *are* miracles extant and possible far beyond our ken, and yes, we *are* shards and aspects of the divine in ways we will never understand, and yes, when we gather together some reminder, some gently opening window, some wriggle of stunning *is* possible; and that is why we go to church, isn't it? That is why we belong to religions, and attend services, and savor sacramental moments, because there might be a rush of sudden water that washes away despair and refills your hope capacitors when you thought they were forever dust and echo. We are all small shy cat burglars edging toward the sacred, thrilled and scared; we are all that boy, unable to resist the impossible possible. CC

Brian Doyle is editor of Portland magazine.

After Ferguson, churches push for change

The hand-folded paper peace cranes that adorn the altar and pulpit at Christ the King United Church of Christ in Florissant, Missouri, a mostly black congregation near Ferguson, have been symbols of hope, peace, and solidarity for many churches across the country during times of national crisis.

The origami-like paper cranes came to Christ the King earlier this year from Old South Church in Boston, which had displayed them after the Boston Marathon bombing last year. Before that, the traveling peace symbols hung in the sanctuary of Newtown Congregational, following the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012.

Such symbols took on added urgency after the decision of a Missouri grand jury, announced November 24, that it would not indict a Ferguson police officer in the shooting death of black teen Michael Brown.

The case, like that of Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012 and the police killing of Eric Garner in New York this summer, has laid bare a racial divide that continues to fuel civil unrest.

Brown's August 9 shooting led to weeks of sometimes violent protests and police counteraction in and around Ferguson, as well as a prolonged and more organized series of protests that at times targeted sporting and cultural events in St. Louis.

After news of the grand jury's decision spread, people set on fire a retail district in Ferguson, and more than 300 people were arrested in Oakland, California.

In a sermon the day before, Traci Blackmon, pastor of Christ the King, compared the protests in Ferguson to the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama that helped usher in the civil rights demonstrations of an earlier generation.

And though she encouraged peaceful protests after the grand jury decision, she told her congregation that its members must continue to stand together for change, according to BBC News.

"The same schools will remain," Blackmon preached, "the same rates of incarceration will remain, and the same racial profiling will remain."

In many ways, black churches and other congregations have taken the lead not only as promoters of peace through the crisis but as leaders in a growing effort to mobilize what some have called a new civil rights movement.

"Our congregations are going to be engaging in what we're calling 'sacred conversations' and really talk out what has been happening the past few months," says Susan Sneed, an organizer with Metropolitan Congregations

United in St. Louis, a consortium of local churches devoted to addressing social issues. "We want to really talk about race and racism, and how it has shaped our community, and how we need to reshape our community in different ways, and try to move forward on some long-term plans to make real change that hasn't been done in the past."

Some member churches with Metropolitan Congregations United were 24/7 "safe places" for demonstrators. Other churches were open for prayer after the grand jury handed down its decision.

Before a series of protests on Black Friday in shopping centers in the St. Louis area, a group of 100 demonstrators discussed strategy after celebrating Thanksgiving in a church basement, Reuters reported.



NATIONWIDE RESPONSE: Protesters march toward the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on November 25, the day after a grand jury announced that it would not bring an indictment in the police killing of a teenager in Ferguson, Missouri. Some call the response to the events a new civil rights movement.

PHOTO BY RBRAMMER (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS)

On November 29, the NAACP launched its Journey for Justice. Starting from the patch of pavement where Brown was shot and killed, a group of 150 protesters—praying and singing hymns—began a seven-day, 120-mile march to the governor’s mansion in Jefferson City.

Ferguson protests also took place nationwide, as protesters shut down highways as far away as Rhode Island. [Predominantly peaceful protesters took to the streets in several U.S. cities, including Chicago, Dallas, New York, Tucson, and Washington, D.C., according to news reports.]

For some pastors, the unrest unleashed by the shooting of Brown could help rekindle the role of black faith communities as leaders in a long-term effort to effect social changes.

“The church did go to sleep for a while,” said Karen Anderson, pastor of Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, another congregation in Florissant, according to Bloomberg. “The church is awakening to the role it can play in helping to bring the community together, helping to educate.” —Harry Bruinius, Patrik Jonsson, and Mark Sappenfield, *The Christian Science Monitor*

National cathedral hosts Muslim prayer service

Prayer carpets for a Muslim Jumu’ah service were spread out in a transept wing of the Washington National Cathedral Friday, November 14, as religious leaders prepared to host the church’s first-ever Muslim-led prayers.

The carpets were arranged diagonally to face Mecca, as is required for Muslim prayers, and now lie under the grand Gothic arches of the National Cathedral, which has a traditional floor plan in the form of a cross. The transept area consists of the two side wings of the church and includes chapels off to the side of the main altar.

The symbolism of Muslim prayers ringing out in America’s symbolic spiritual center—a cathedral of the Episcopal Church in the nation’s capital



HOUSE OF PRAYER: The Washington National Cathedral, which aims “to serve as the spiritual home for the nation,” hosted its first Muslim prayers in a wing to the side of the nave.

which has hosted presidential funerals, inaugural prayer services, and other nationally important spiritual services—is an attempt to heal the religious rifts that afflict the globe, organizers said.

Ebrahim Rasool, the South African ambassador to the United States, helped organize the event with Gina Campbell, the cathedral’s director of liturgy, after the two worked together last December to plan a memorial service for Nelson Mandela.

The night before Mandela’s memorial, as Rasool and Campbell were standing in the cathedral’s soaring nave—the long central space of the cruciform church—Rasool told the Episcopal priest that the space reminded him of being in an ancient mosque.

“What struck me was how he could look at our building and see his mosque. That was a powerful moment,” Campbell told the *Huffington Post*. “To realize we could be standing in the same spot in the same building and see our own prayer traditions.”

The two became friends and discussed how to promote religious dialogue and understanding amid global turmoil often defined by religious conflict. They decided to conduct a Friday Jumu’ah service, which is the Muslim day of prayer, akin to Christian Sundays and Jewish Shabbat.

“This is a dramatic moment in the

world and in Muslim-Christian relations,” Rasool said in a statement. “This needs to be a world in which all are free to believe and practice and in which we avoid bigotry, Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Christianity and embrace our humanity and embrace faith.”

The service took place just after noon and was cosponsored by various Muslim groups, including the All Dulles Area Muslim Society, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Islamic Society of North America.

The Washington National Cathedral streamed the service live on its website. Rasool delivered the *khutbah*, or Muslim sermon, during the prayers.

Many churches and synagogues around the country host such Muslim prayer services, organizers said, but the venue in the nation’s capital holds special symbolic significance for the estimated 3 million Muslims in the United States.

“We want the world to see the Christian community is partnering with us and is supporting our religious freedom in the same way we are calling for religious freedom for all minorities in Muslim countries,” Rizwan Jaka, a spokesman for the All Dulles Area Muslim Society mosque in Sterling, Virginia, told the *Washington Post*. “Let this be a lesson to the world.” —Harry Bruinius, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Sixty imams and rabbis gather in Washington to trade ideas for advancing interfaith understanding

Frustrated by high tensions between Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land, 60 imams and rabbis gathered in late November to hatch concrete plans to bridge the gulf between their communities.

Organizers hope that the 2014 Summit of Washington Area Imams and Rabbis will be the first of many such gatherings of Jewish and Muslim clergy in cities across the United States.

After prayers and a kosher-halal lunch at a Washington synagogue, the clergy resolved to limit feel-good talk and spent the afternoon trading ideas. Among them: joint projects to feed the homeless, basketball games between Muslim and Jewish teens, Judaism 101 courses for Muslims, and Islam 101 for Jews.

"Host a seder in a mosque and hold an iftar dinner at a synagogue," suggested Rizwan Jaka, who chairs the board at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society in northern Virginia.

They threw out tough questions: "Do you invite people in your community who are particularly closed-minded to participate in interfaith dialogue?" asked Dan Spiro, cofounder of the Jewish-Islamic Dialogue Society.

And when Jews and Muslims meet, several imams and rabbis advised, they should not sidestep the focal point of their mutual pain: the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"Discuss things from a spiritual narrative as opposed to a political narrative," said Imam Sultan Abdullah of the New Africa Islamic Community Center in Washington.

Both rabbis and imams repeated that Jews and Muslims believe they are descended from the sons of Abraham—Jews from Isaac and Muslims from Ishmael. In practice, they noted, similarities between the faiths abound. Both face toward the Middle East at prayer, for example, and share similar dietary laws.

"In my view we are the closest two religions in the world," said Gerry Serotta,

executive director of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, who sees healing between Muslims and Jews as a blessing.

"There is something about a Jewish-Muslim rapprochement that is very important for the rest of the world," Serotta said. "The perception is that Jews and Muslims are irreconcilable, and when people see that we're not, it gives them hope."
—Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service

Bible museum begins construction in D.C., but curriculum is shelved

Construction began on the Museum of the Bible, founded and funded by Hobby Lobby's Steve Green, in Washington, D.C., this fall, while an Oklahoma school district shelved his Bible curriculum.

The high-tech museum, set to open in fall 2017, is four blocks from the U.S. Capitol and two blocks from the National Mall. The new museum will feature standing exhibits on the history and impact of the Bible as well as interactive features on Bible stories and characters.

Green, who has a world-class collection of Bible artifacts, told Religion News Service that believers, skeptics, and the "intellectually curious" alike can visit and learn.

"The Bible can speak for itself, explain itself," he said. "There really isn't a barrier for this book."

Blowback since the museum's announcement in 2011 doesn't bother him.

"Anytime you do anything with the Bible, people respond with emotion—emotion for and against it," he said. "That people want to express their love or their hate is not surprising."

Religious freedom, Green said, is a biblical concept. The Green family—generations of Pentecostals and Baptists—has funded Bible scholarship, biblical archaeology, and the drafting of a proposed public school curriculum on the Bible.

Two groups that opposed the elective curriculum said in late November that the public schools in Mustang,



UNDER WAY: An exterior rendering of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. The eight-story, 430,000-square-foot museum is being built blocks from the Capitol.

Oklahoma, just a few miles from Hobby Lobby headquarters, decided not to use the curriculum, which was approved in April by the school board.

"In summary, the topic of a Bible course in the Mustang School District is no longer a discussion item nor is there a plan to provide such a course in the foreseeable future," Superintendent Sean McDaniel wrote in an e-mail to the Freedom from Religion Foundation and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The two groups, working with the American Civil Liberties Union, had filed a freedom-of-information request concerning the school board's role with the curriculum.

"Education officials in Mustang did the wise thing," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Objective study about religion in public schools is permissible, but this curriculum was essentially an extended Sunday school lesson."

The superintendent wrote that the district was not able to review the final curriculum, nor did it receive a "commitment to provide legal coverage to the district" if faced with a lawsuit—both of which he termed "non-negotiables."

When the Mustang school board made 220 pages of a course textbook public this summer, church-state experts suggested that its claims and assumptions amounted to teaching the Bible from a particular religious perspective,

which the Supreme Court has banned in public schools.

"In its current form, sectarian bias, including the principle that the Bible is inerrant, is built into the structure," said Mark Chancey, a religion professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Jerry Pattengale, senior editor for the high school curriculum, said he looks forward to working with other school districts.

"We understand Mustang's decision to withdraw the new, elective Bible course from consideration," said Pattengale, who also is executive director of education for the Museum of the Bible. "Museum of the Bible remains committed to providing an elective high school Bible curriculum and continues work on an innovative, high-tech course that will provide students and teachers with a scholarly overview of the Bible's history, narrative, and impact."

The curriculum editors plan to include connections to the Greens' vast collection of biblical artifacts, to be featured in the museum.

In June, Green's company won a closely watched Supreme Court decision that granted corporations such as Hobby Lobby religious exemptions from covering women's contraception in company health insurance plans. —Adelle Banks, Cathy Lynn Grossman, and David Van Biema, Religion News Service

African religious leaders draw safe practices map to fight Ebola virus

African church leaders, theologians, and health professionals have drawn up a road map to educate faith communities in the fight against Ebola.

The virus has killed more than 5,000 so far and has been declared a global security threat by the United Nations.

The road map, drawn at a three-day conference in late November in Nairobi that was attended by 70 religious and health-care leaders, highlights the role faith groups can play as part of the global response, according to church leaders.

FREDRICK NZWILI / RELIGION NEWS SERVICE



PREVENTION: Dr. Ian Njeru (left) from Kenya's Ministry of Health explains to religious leaders, theologians, and health professionals at a conference in Nairobi how Ebola is spread. Pauline Njiru (right), the Eastern African coordinator of the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa, holds a poster about Ebola prevention.

"We were taken by surprise by the crisis," Andre Karamaga, All Africa Conference of Churches general secretary, told participants at the gathering organized by the World Council of Churches.

The road map includes, among other items, actions to fight stigma, discrimination, and misinformation. It also offers a reshaping of burial practices to ensure that religious communities burying their dead are using safe practices to avoid infection.

Karen Sichinga of Zambia's Churches Health Association said people from the affected countries are pleading with other nations to stop stigmatizing them because of Ebola. Such stigma has impeded travel and imposed hardships on children whose parents have died of the disease.

"If we continue with stigma, it will complicate the issue," Sichinga said.

Participants also wanted to ensure that the faith communities have a voice in national and international platforms.

Susan Parry, program executive for health and healing at the WCC, said that while the international community has mounted a response to the virus, ensuring a united faith community response is critical.

"They are the gatekeepers to communities," she said. "We will be strengthening interfaith relations because no one person can deal with this alone." —Fredrick Nzwili, Religion News Service

Parents are top influence in teens remaining active in religion as young adults

Mothers and fathers who practice what they preach and preach what they practice are far and away the biggest influence related to adolescents keeping the faith into their twenties, according to new findings from a landmark study of youth and religion.

Just 1 percent of teens age 15 to 17 raised by parents who attached little importance to religion were highly religious in their mid to late twenties.

In contrast, 82 percent of children raised by parents who talked about faith at home, attached great importance to their beliefs, and were active in their congregations were religiously active as young adults, according to data from the latest wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion.

The connection is "nearly deterministic," said Christian Smith, lead researcher for the study and a sociologist at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

Other factors such as youth ministry, clergy or service projects, or religious schools pale in comparison.

Nothing else "comes remotely close to matching the influence of parents on the religious faith and practices of youth," Smith said in a recent talk about the findings at Yale Divinity School. "Parents just dominate."

Several studies have shown that the religious behaviors and attitudes of parents are related to those of their children.

In research using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, sociologists Christopher Bader and Scott Desmond found that children of parents who believe that religion is very important and display their commitment by attending services are most likely to transmit religiosity to their children.

This is the fourth wave of the NSYR, a comprehensive national study first conducted in 2002–2003 among teens age 13 to 17 and their parents. These early findings add powerful evidence of the impor-

tance of mothers and fathers as the study traces the path of young respondents, who are now age 24 to 29.

One of the strongest factors associated with older teens keeping their faith as young adults was having parents who talked about religion and spirituality at home, Smith said.

Other key factors included having parents for whom personal faith is important and who demonstrate that faith through attending services. Teens whose parents attended worship with them were especially likely to be religiously active as young adults.

Among related findings, parents from religious traditions that in general promote greater commitment and encourage discussing faith outside the sanctuary also were more likely to have children who remained active in their faith as young adults.

For example, two-thirds of teens raised by black Protestant parents and half of adolescents with conservative Protestant parents had high or moderate levels of religiousness as young adults. On the other end, 70 percent of teens raised by mainline Protestant parents had minimal or lower levels of religiousness as young adults.

In interviews, many mainline Protestant parents said they “feel guilty if they think they are doing anything to direct their children toward their religion as opposed to any other possibility,” Smith said. They question if they should tell their child “what I believe is right.”

Yet if parents and faith communities are not able to communicate their beliefs, Smith said later, “the game’s over, already.”

The role of parents is even more critical today as trust in institutions declines and many children with more demanding schedules are spending less time in congregations, Smith noted.

Yet, he said, there are some powerful “cultural scripts” that discourage parents from taking an active role in the spiritual lives of their teens.

Cultural messages encourage parents to turn their children over to “experts,” and many parents consider faith formation to be the responsibility of clergy, Sunday schools, and youth groups, Smith said.

“Parents, for better or worse, are actually the most influential pastors . . . of their children,” Smith said. “Parents set a kind of glass ceiling of religious commitment, above which their children rarely rise.” —David Briggs, theARDA.com

Reprinted with permission of the Association of Religion Data Archives

Across Latin America, the number of Catholics drops, Protestants and unaffiliated increase

In just one generation, Latin America has seen the number of people who identify themselves as Catholic plummet, with more people becoming Protestant or dropping religion altogether, a new report shows.

The shift is dramatic for a region that has long been a bastion of Catholicism. With more than 425 million Catholics, Latin America accounts for nearly 40 percent of the global Catholic population. Through the 1960s, at least 90 percent of Latin Americans were Catholic, and 84 percent of people surveyed recently by the Pew Research Center said they were raised Catholic.

But the report released in mid-November found that only 69 percent of Latin Americans still consider themselves Catholic, with more people switching to more conservative Protestant churches (19 percent) or describing themselves as agnostic or religiously unaffiliated (8 percent).

Among those who are Protestant, 65 percent identify themselves as Pentecostals, whether or not they belong to a Pentecostal denomination.

“While the movement from Catholicism to Protestantism has occurred among people of all ages and socioeconomic levels, the survey reveals some broad demographic patterns among converts,” the report states. “In most countries surveyed, pluralities of Catholic-to-Protestant converts say they left Catholicism before the age of 25.”

In Argentina, Bolivia, and Costa Rica, those who became Protestant were less

likely to have secondary education than Catholics.

The study also points to more frequent religious practice, including prayer and reading scripture outside of services, among Protestants as compared to Catholics in Latin America.

“A regional median of 83 percent of Protestants report attending church at least once a month, compared with a median of 62 percent of Catholics,” the report states.

People gave Pew a wide variety of reasons for abandoning the Catholic Church. The most common was people saying they wanted a more personal connection with God. Others said they enjoyed the style of worship at their new church or that they were looking for a greater emphasis on morality.

Even last year’s election of an Argentine as pope has led to conflicting feelings in Latin America.

The study found that “people who are currently Catholic overwhelmingly view Francis favorably and consider his papacy a major change for the church,” the report states. “But former Catholics are more skeptical about Pope Francis.”

Pew’s research also suggests that evangelization efforts have worked. More than half of the people who switched from the Catholic Church to Protestant churches (58 percent) say their new church reached out to them.

The shift in beliefs mirrors those seen in the Hispanic population in the United States. About 22 percent of Hispanics in the United States are now members of Protestant churches, compared to 19 percent in Latin America.

In addition to affiliated religion, many in the region say they believe in some practices associated with Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Brazilian, and indigenous religions. For example, at least a third of adults in every country believe in the “evil eye,” or the idea that some people can cast curses on others.

The report was prepared by conducting 30,000 face-to-face interviews in three languages in 18 countries between October 2013 and February 2014. The margin of error for each country ranges between 2.8 and 4 points. —Alan Gomez, *USA Today*, added sources

People

PHOTO COURTESY OF INTERFAITH ALLIANCE / RELIGION NEWS SERVICE



■ For 16 years, **C. Welton Gaddy** has worn two hats—preaching most Sundays and advocating for equal treatment of people of all beliefs on weekdays in Washington.

Gaddy, a former president of both the Alliance of Baptists and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, is retiring as president of the Interfaith Alliance. But he plans to continue as pastor of Northminster Church, an Alliance of Baptists congregation in Monroe, Louisiana.

“A lot of the people in Washington who talk about religion don’t understand religion; it’s more of a subject of theoretical discussion,” said Gaddy, 73. “That’s why it has been important that I have my one foot in a local congregation and one foot in a national agency.”

In 1998, he took the helm of the Interfaith Alliance, which aimed to demonstrate that “the Pat Robertsons and Jerry Falwells of the world don’t represent all Christians.”

Gaddy is particularly proud of his office’s work on hate crimes legislation. Other goals remained elusive, especially getting the Obama administration to halt a Bush-era policy that allows faith-based groups to hire and fire based on religion while receiving government funding.

“When they formed the task force on making the [White House faith-based] office constitutional, they asked me to be on it,” he said. “The day they called I said, ‘You know, I still want it closed.’”

Despite those differences, the White House included Gaddy on that task force.

“We’ve drawn inspiration from the fact that he always suggests that one needs to be proactive about these things, not just reactive,” said Sabi Singh, a Sikh layman who is president of the Interfaith Alliance of Oklahoma.

Gaddy has also engaged various topics on his *State of Belief* weekly radio program and podcast.

“One of the most difficult parts of leaving this office is that I think religious freedom in our nation is under more attack and in more danger than it was 25 years ago,” he said. “The Catholic bishops and the Christian evangelicals have done to religious freedom what they did to the Bible: they co-opted the language of it.”

Richard Land, former head of the Southern Baptists’ Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and Gaddy have been “respectful adversaries,” Land said. “With him, it was issues. It was not personal attack.”

Even as he waged church-state wars, Gaddy spent about 20 hours each week preparing a sermon to preach to a congregation of about 125 where Republicans and Democrats, gay and straight people worship side by side.

James Yeldell, chair of the church council, said, “He doesn’t mince his words with us at all, but then again we’re not a real typical congregation.” —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

■ **Martin Salia**, chief medical officer and the only surgeon at United Methodist Kissy Hospital in Sierra Leone, died after he was airlifted to the United States for treatment for Ebola.

“We are trying to come to terms with the reality of his death,” said John K. Yambasu, bishop of the Sierra Leone United Methodist Conference. “We never thought we would be losing one of our head doctors to Ebola.”

Salia, 44, was not treating anyone with Ebola at Kissy but worked at

other hospitals because he was in demand as one of the few surgeons in the country, Yambasu said. Many people in hospitals think they have malaria or other common diseases and are not aware they have Ebola, he added.

Salia died November 17 at Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha three days after he arrived in “extremely critical” condition.

Rosanna Morris, chief nursing officer, called it “an absolute honor to care for Dr. Salia” and praised his wife, Isatu Salia, who was at the medical center when he died. “She is an incredibly strong, stoic, brave individual who really taught us a lot about someone going through these circumstances,” Morris said.

United Methodist conferences are raising funds to help Salia’s family pay medical expenses—including the \$200,000 cost of transport—as well as meet other needs.

In an interview with United Methodist Communications earlier this year, Salia talked about how important it was for him to work at a Christian hospital.

“I took this job not because I want to, but I firmly believe that it was a calling and that God wanted me to,” Salia said. “I’m confident that I just need to lean on him, trust him, for whatever comes in, because he sent me here.”

Kissy serves one of the poorest neighborhoods in Freetown. The 60-bed United Methodist hospital is part of a larger community outreach that includes a school, an eye clinic, and a newly updated maternal and child health facility.

Kissy Hospital was shut down November 11 after Salia tested positive for Ebola. The doctor quarantined himself as soon as he started feeling ill, which was around November 4.

The Ministry of Health has started the first of five rounds of decontamination at the hospital. Kissy Hospital’s 91 staff members are home under quarantine for the next 21 days. Three people who had contact with Salia after he got sick but before he tested positive for Ebola are under quarantine at Kissy. None of the three are sick. —Kathy L. Gilbert, United Methodist News Service



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, December 28

Luke 2:22–40

WHEN 73-YEAR-OLD Morris Weiser reached up with his cane to tap the ceiling of the aging Chasam Sopher synagogue on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a shower of decaying plaster fell onto the wooden pews below. "I'm scared that on Rosh Hashanah the ceiling will fall down and hurt someone," Weiser told the *New York Times*.

That was almost 30 years ago, and Weiser, a retired butcher, had already been working for four decades to save the declining synagogue. He lost seven brothers and four sisters during World War II and was one of only 200 Jews to survive the terrors of the Janowska concentration camp in Poland, where at least 40,000 people were killed. After the war, Weiser came to New York and almost immediately began worshipping at Chasam Sopher.

By the late 1980s, though, the neighborhood had deteriorated, the synagogue had no rabbi, many of the members had moved elsewhere, and it was a struggle even to gather a minyan for services. Weiser himself was in declining health, his stomach damaged by his ordeal in the prison camp. "I'm broken down like this shul," he said. Nevertheless, Weiser believed that God had saved him from Hitler in order that he might save this synagogue as a place of worship. One day, he said, gazing with hope into God's future, "there'll be a lot of Jews here."

Morris Weiser could well have been a character in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. This swath of the book is a metaphorical retirement home for elderly Jews who, like Morris Weiser, are "looking forward to the consolation of Israel." There is Zechariah, a priest at the temple, and his wife Elizabeth, both of whom have lived righteous and blameless lives, despite the bitter disappointment of childlessness. They are, Luke says delicately, "getting on in years." There is devout Simeon, old enough to be contemplating his own death, looking expectantly every day for the appearance of the Messiah. And there is Anna, in her eighties, fasting and praying night and day in the temple, searching for a sign that God will redeem Jerusalem.

And then, in a sudden swirl of events, God gathers these aging people into the drama of salvation. "By the tender mercy of God," Zechariah will later sing, "the dawn from on high broke upon us." Astonishingly, Zechariah and Elizabeth have a child, a son named John who will become a preacher of repentance and baptism and, even more important, will bear witness to the One who will baptize with the Spirit and fire. Simeon, who has been spending his time gazing at the actuarial charts of his own mortality, amazingly finds himself in the temple gazing instead into the face of the Christ Child. "My eyes have

seen your salvation!" he cries. Anna, always hanging around the temple, watches the whole thing and then races all over town excitedly giving the news of this child to all who were "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

And then these four senior citizens, having sung their songs and spoken their lines, disappear from Luke. It's strange. It is almost as if, having seen the news reports of God's coming salvation in Jesus, they get up, turn off the television, go to bed, and leave the rest of the story to twenty- and thirtysomethings. And they depart not because they are weary but because they are all full of hope in God's providence—and therefore able to trust the future to God.

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna have a faith that leans forward into the promises of God, even when they have no idea how those promises will be fulfilled. Readers of Luke will discover soon enough that everything these four saints hope for is indeed accomplished—Israel is consoled, the gentiles are given light, and a mighty savior is raised up in a blaze of Easter glory.

In my city there is a congregation whose gifted and faithful pastor had formal charges filed against him by denominational officials because he was in a committed same-sex partnership. The congregation stood firmly with its pastor, and a groundswell of support for him emerged across their denomination. Several years of judicial process and discernment over this case eventually led that denomination to change its policies and to take a more gracious and just position toward gay and lesbian clergy and members.

Several months ago I attended a meeting at this church. I noticed on the walls several photographs of the sort that hang in many churches: buildings, pastors, Sunday school classes from days gone by. In one black-and-white photo—taken, I would guess, in the late 1940s—the congregation is gathered in the churchyard. There they are, in their loosely hanging suits and church dresses, some of them wearing the heavy-framed eyeglasses of the day. They have no doubt just been in worship, praying that God will bring justice and peace to the world.

As they looked into the camera so long ago, they had no idea, of course, that years later it would be their own congregation that God would use to bring some of that justice and peace to the world. They were simply—like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna—leaning forward by faith into the promises of God.

As for Chasam Sopher, in the last few years the building has been beautifully renovated. Their rabbi leads services every day, and they no longer worry about gathering a quorum. It is known in the neighborhood as "the shul where everyone is welcome." Morris Weiser's son, Eugene, now serves as synagogue president. There are indeed "a lot of Jews there" now—just as his father predicted, leaning forward into the promises of God.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, January 4 | Epiphany of the Lord
Matthew 2:1–12

AMERICAN BANDSTAND and I came of age together. As I was entering my teens, Dick Clark's television rock 'n' roll dance party was cresting in popularity. Like many of my classmates, most days I would postpone algebra homework after school to watch Philadelphia's youth bopping to the tunes of Danny and the Juniors, Lavern Baker, Dion and the Belmonts, and Gene Vincent.

At its peak, *Bandstand* drew more than 20 million viewers, and it was assumed that the audience was so large because of an expansive and shared youth culture. We teenagers, in other words, simply wanted to see people like us doing on national television what we liked to do ourselves at sock hops in the school gym.

Well, maybe for some, but not for me. I was an anxious adolescent in Georgia, glued to the television not because the kids on *Bandstand* were just like me but because they were not. There they were, these sleek and confident avatars with their Italian-cut suits, moussed hair, and tight skirts, wheeling with ease around the dance floor. Then, during the Rate-a-Record segment, they smacked their gum and told Clark in their almost indecipherable South Street accents that "they liked the beat and gave it a 90." I knew they were from Philadelphia, but they might as well have been from Persia.

This alien exoticism is an intrinsic part of Matthew's story of the wise men. Part of the story's point is that even the gentiles will come from afar to bow down before the king of the Jews—but boy oh boy, these aren't just any gentiles. These are not the sort of next-door gentiles who might have slipped over the border into Judea to help out with the wheat harvest. These are magi, astrologers, magicians from the East, carrying gold and perfumes and tracking their journey by the stars. These are gentiles with the volume turned up to 11. When they sashay into Jerusalem asking for the newborn king of the Jews, Herod and the Pharisees and the scribes could not be more shocked and perplexed if it were Gladys Knight and the Pips, woop-wooping into town on that midnight train from Georgia.

In a way, the magi's arrival should be expected; Isaiah had announced that "all the nations" would stream to the Lord's mountain. But few imagined that they would arrive with horoscopes, fragrant aromatics, and nature religion. It all fits Matthew's theology, of course, that God honors all the old commandments and promises—"not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law"—but fulfills them in ways thoroughly

unimaginable. After all, a writer who can open his Gospel by inserting five women's names into an otherwise standard genealogy is an evangelist who knows that God does not write in straight lines, but fulfills every prophecy with a surprise.

There is an unexpectedly amusing moment in Raymond Brown's masterly commentary on the New Testament Christmas texts, *The Birth of the Messiah*. Brown observes how the piety of the church has worked overtime on this wise men story. In Christians' imagination, the magi have morphed into kings, and Christians have decided there were three of them. We have even given them different colors, ethnicities, and names. Brown cites a fanciful entry in an ancient saints' calendar in which the three wise men, having served as tireless champions of the gospel and now centenarians, meet for one last Christmas reunion in Armenia. After celebrating the Mass of the Nativity, the three magi die within days of one another.

One would expect Brown, the exacting exegete, to come down with a sledgehammer on such embellishments. Instead, he wryly observes that all this coloring in of the story with the crayons of imagination and piety is pretty much exactly what Matthew hoped would happen. The exotic details invite us to

God fulfills old commandments and promises in unimaginable ways.

imagine the unimaginable: that the God of Israel has in generosity turned the face of mercy toward all nations, and that magi from the East and people from Philadelphia or Georgia can stream to Mount Zion and learn God's ways.

In other words, the story of the magi cracks open the story of "Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" to let us see that there is a place there for those who are near and even for those who come from afar. "Naïve?" asks Brown. "Yes, but a valid hermeneutic instinct nevertheless."

No wonder, then, that Herod and all of Jerusalem shake like leaves in the wind when the wise men show up and ask about the king of the Jews. The question implies a wider and more gracious kingdom in play than the shriveled precinct they assume they control. What's more, it hints that the little tin-pot Herod has no control over access. On Christmas Eve, children all over put on bathrobes and Burger King crowns and make their way down the church aisle to Bethlehem, imagining themselves to be a part of the great story of Jesus Christ. They're onto something.

The author is Thomas G. Long, who teaches at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and is the author of Preaching from Memory to Hope.

Holy water everywhere

by Steve Thorngate

I WAS BAPTIZED in a swimming pool in my childhood pastor's backyard. I was 12. Asked to make a confession of faith, I mumbled something incoherent through chattering teeth. I was focused on the embarrassing fact that my feet did not reach the bottom; my pastor and my dad had to hold me up.

The congregation was young then and worshiped in a fontless gymnasium. These days it does baptisms either in its baptistry or in a lake across town. The pastor who baptized me is long gone. So is his backyard pool—I checked.

I checked because I've long been vaguely bothered by the fact that my baptism happened in such an arbitrary, rootless place, in neither a church nor a natural body of water. Over time, my sense of self has grown increasingly dependent on a

one that both locates us in a holy place and liberates us for the life of the holy earth. It is not a local map that stresses boundaries and the dangerous unknown that lies beyond them; nor is it a globe that erases everything particular, small, and nearby. Also, it is not a map of a faraway land of ancient saints and relics. The holy place is not a discrete somewhere else. It is everywhere, and it is here.

In just such a faraway land, there is a church where sixth-century Christians mapped their world on the floor beneath their feet. At St. George's in Madaba, Jordan, a large mosaic map depicts the surrounding region. The map highlights various biblical sites; it also encompasses Madaba itself, a holy place among holy places.

This map isn't tucked into some corner of St. George's. It's on the floor—it is the floor—of the worship space itself. The community that gathered there stood on its own holy ground, which contained a representation of that ground's connection to the world around it. The church's sacramental practice was literally held up by an image of the local land in relationship with the upper room in Jerusalem, with the table in Emmaus, with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist at the Jordan.

The baptismal site is on the East Bank, 16 miles northwest of Madaba. Bethany Beyond the Jordan—not to be confused

We are baptized in local water. But this is just half the story.

sense of physical place—and my spirituality has grown deeper baptismal roots. I find myself longing to return to the place of my baptism. But that place doesn't exactly exist; the land remains, but not the water.

Baptism, says liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop, is *locative*. We are baptized in the water of a particular place, into the physical life of a particular community. The earth as universalized abstraction, the faith as otherworldly or purely cerebral—the water of baptism pushes hard against such tendencies. This place, here—this ground, this water—is holy.

But this is just half the story. In Lathrop's telling, baptism is also *liberative*. We are baptized into the global body of Christ, into solidarity with the whole earth and its people. The closed and insular community, the impulse to contain God within four walls—baptism pushes against these tendencies as well. The earth and water here are intimately connected to earth and water elsewhere, and those places are holy, too.

Baptism holds the locative and liberative in tension, revealing what Lathrop calls “the hole in the system”—like the hole in the heavens at Jesus' baptism—of any attempt to map the cosmos according to the local status quo on the one hand or escape elsewhere on the other. Baptism creates its own map,



FLOOR TILES: A mosaic depiction of the Jordan River flowing into the Dead Sea. Detail of a sixth-century map on the floor of St. George's Church in Madaba, Jordan.



DRY FONT: A cruciform font at the site long observed as the place of Jesus' baptism, just east of the Jordan River in Jordan. The river is no longer big enough for water to reach the font consistently.



with Bethany on the West Bank, home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—is a Byzantine pilgrimage destination that was rediscovered around the turn of the 20th century, based partly on information provided by the Madaba map. It's also called *Bethabara*, the name Judges 7 uses for the location of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites. Bethany has become the jewel of Jordan's several biblical sites, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

They don't come for the natural beauty. At the Alumot Dam—just south of the Sea of Galilee—the Israelis divert most of the Jordan's water for irrigation and drinking. Nearby, sewage and agricultural runoff are emptied into what's left of the river. A few miles downstream it picks up the Yarmouk, its biggest tributary—though the Yarmouk would be a lot bigger at this point if the Jordanians weren't diverting a whole lot of its water, too. By the time the Lower Jordan gets down to Bethany, it's just a dirty little stream (see “River revival,” July 11, 2012). Last year, Israel began releasing more fresh water through the Alumot, a good step but so far a relatively small one. For now, visitors to Bethany are often disappointed by the river itself.

“The river isn't the river we had back 2,000 years ago,” said Rustom Mkhjian, the Baptism Site Commission's director of archaeological works and our guide when I visited. “That's why we'll visit two different sites, if you don't mind.” A short walk from the riverbank sit the ruins of a chapel and a large cruciform font, the actual place where pilgrims once observed Jesus' baptism and underwent their own. A set of marble steps remains, steps that took baptismal candidates down to the water. A sixth-century source notes that the water at the bottom of the steps was chest high on a tall man in the summer and over his head in the winter.

I visited in the fall and found the font entirely dry. It's a striking site, this ancient place in the history of Christian baptism. It'd be even more striking with some water. But there isn't always enough left in the Jordan.

Some of it leaves with pilgrims, who take the river home with them by the bottle full. (They used to do this by the bar-

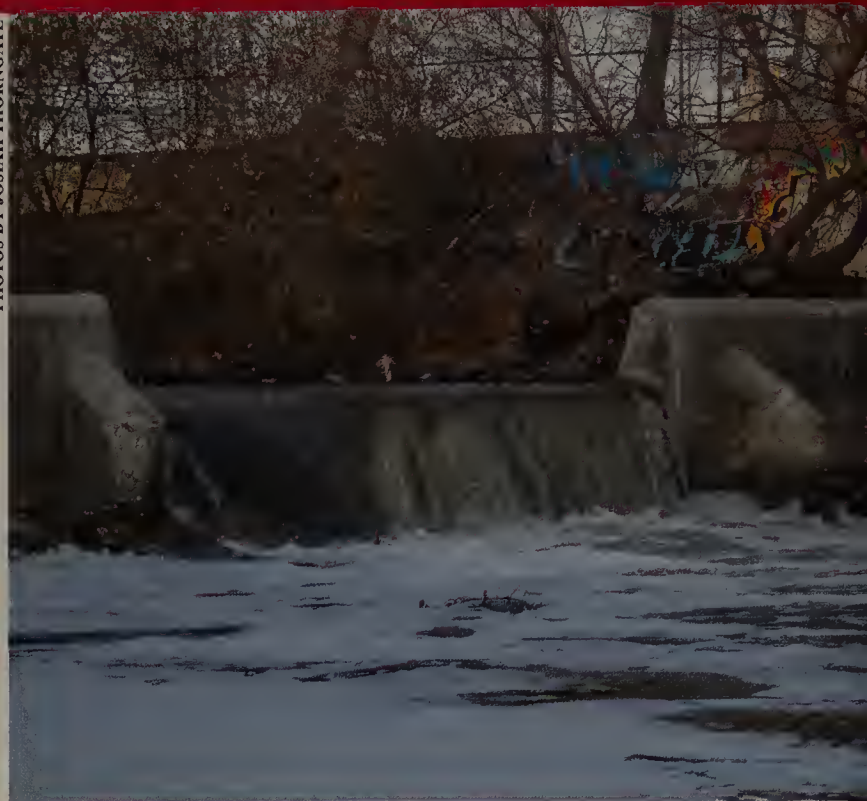
rel full.) This practice is not a major reason the Lower Jordan is so diminished, of course; that distinction goes to the dams upstream. Still, when you visit a depleted little river, it's an odd spiritual practice to take a little more of its water with you when you go.

It's odd, that is, if the whole world is holy. If you feel instead that the rare holiness of Jesus' baptismal site renders other places comparatively profane, then why not take a bottle of extra-polluted, extra-holy water to go? At this point, the Lower Jordan is no longer big enough to technically count as a river at all. “It's not even a river,” said Mkhjian, “yet it is the holiest of rivers in the entire world.”

Our group heard a lot of this sort of superlative in Jordan: we were walking on exceptionally holy ground. That's appealing language for Christians who hunger to know the Bible's world intimately, not to mention for a nation that could use their tourism dollars. It's less helpful, however, for a spirituality of baptism that locates and liberates. “We'll respect the [baptismal] site,” said Mkhjian, stressing its fragility, “because we're walking in the place where John and Jesus walked.” There and elsewhere, of course, we walk in places created by God. This ought to be reason enough to respect them.

And yet I found Bethany deeply moving. Jesus' baptismal site, after all, has something in common with my own: an off-putting lack of water. I went to the place where pilgrims have long marked the institution of Christian baptism, and I found it as dry as the backyard where my childhood pastor's pool used to be. Baptism happens in a particular place, with particular water. Thank God it isn't limited to the fragile waters of a single place but encompasses them within a far greater reality, a whole world of holy water.

At the Jordan, I knelt down like one of Gideon's soldiers, dipped my hand in the brown water, and made the sign of the cross. I remembered my baptism while kneeling at the place where Jesus was baptized—or at least near it, where a smelly little rivulet remains.



DIRTY RIVER: River Park's spillway, a concrete waterfall that connects the Chicago River North Branch with the North Shore Channel, a drainage canal built to flush the polluted North Branch downstream.

the North Branch. So has fishing—especially in our neighborhood, where a small waterfall connecting the river with the canal provides some fauna-friendly aeration. Swimming, however, remains restricted, and in hot weather the North Branch smells just awful.

We moved in shortly before Holy Week. On Good Friday we took our customary silent walk by the local water. On the river bank, we saw this sign:

Caution. This waterway is not suitable for:

- Wading
- Swimming
- Jet skiing
- Water skiing/tubing
- Any human body contact

Blessing didn't get its own bullet point, but the implication seemed pretty clear. We agreed, wordlessly, not to dip our hands in.

There's a lot that's fascinating about the reversal of the Chicago River, from the engineering innovation itself to the fact that it transformed Chicago from Lake Michigan's dirtiest polluter to its thirstiest consumer. But what fascinates me most is that the project joined two major watersheds. In the northern Midwest, water ends up in either the Great Lakes system or the Mississippi River. The Chicago River and its canal system now carry Lake Michigan water to the Des Plaines, to the Illinois, and on to the Mississippi, creating a spigot from one watershed to the other. The water is all connected.

This is not entirely a good thing. Instead of treating wastewater locally like most cities do, Chicago flushes it out west,

My wife and I like to do this when we're walking alongside water. We haven't traveled outside North America together, but we've crossed ourselves and each other at the Rose River in the Shenandoah Valley and anonymous streams in West Virginia, at deep lakes in Wisconsin and shallow ones in California, at big bays off Great Lakes and even bigger ones off oceans. Years ago, we began a tradition of a silent walk on Good Friday. We improvise the route, but we always end up along water near wherever we're living: Rock Creek in Washington, D.C., the Potomac River in Maryland, Lake Michigan in Chicago.

A couple of years ago we moved across town to Chicago's northwest side, farther from the lake but just steps from where the Chicago River North Branch joins the North Shore Channel, a hundred-year-old drainage canal built to flush the flimsy North Branch downstream. If people know one thing about the Chicago River, it's that engineers once reversed its flow: it used to pour sewage into Lake Michigan, now it draws clean water out of it. But that's the river's Main Stem, which bisects the central business district. The North Branch is a tributary that has always flowed downtown, into the Main Stem, and it was and remains absolutely disgusting.

It has improved in recent decades, actually. An ongoing project of tunnels and reservoirs redirects more and more wastewater away from the river. Canoes and kayaks have returned to

Eliab's complaint

1 Samuel 16

I had all the qualifications:
the prerogatives of the firstborn,
the stature of a man of authority, a Goliath,
an aquiline nose, an Octavian head,
a heart flaming with anger, Saul's
good looks and regal gait. I had splendor
and grace. I prayed loudly, devoutly.
I came from good roots
and was born in the right place.
Who could be holier from Bethlehem?

How could my kid brother be anointed,
the one with rosacea, looks like carpenter's
shavings, the smell of sheep dung on his hands,
who roamed the fields looking for a lost lamb.
He wasn't even invited to the sacrificial banquet.

That old stickler Samuel knew I should be king.
I coveted the horn that was strapped
over his shoulders leaning toward me.
Why wasn't that good enough for God?
My name alone should have given me
the edge in the kingdom.

Any fool could see that.

Philip C. Kolin



SMELLY BUBBLES: *Trash and foam collect alongside the River Park spillway in Chicago.*

semitreated, for another place to deal with. And when an invasive species turns up in one of the two watersheds—as the Asian carp has in recent years, making its way up the Mississippi—it’s a problem for both of them. Lately, advocates for healthy waterways have stressed the need to work toward re-reversing the river. Whatever else this feat of early 20th-century engineering was, it was a rejection of the locative, a failure to live sustainably within a place.

Ultimately, of course, the water was always connected and always will be. The Gulf of Mexico that receives the Mississippi is part of the same ocean that receives the Great Lakes by way of the Saint Lawrence. Watersheds are deeply invested in the local, but most flow eventually to the sea. This is why some

A person’s baptism shouldn’t land her in the hospital.

Christian thinkers are finding watersheds to be such a useful way of thinking about faithful, sustainable living: because they draw local boundaries by natural rather than civil means, but also because these boundaries are not absolute, not locative to a fault (see “Watershed disciples,” October 29, 2014). Watersheds are not closed loops.

A few, however, are dead ends. One notable example: the Jordan River basin, which terminates at the fast-receding Dead Sea. There are plans to build a “Red-Dead Canal” between the rhyming biblical seas, essentially an expensive and environmentally disruptive end around the problem of the parched Lower Jordan. It’ll be a watershed intervention on par with Chicago’s—but flowing into the Jordan basin, not out of it. The trickle of Jordan that makes it all the way down to Jesus’ bap-

tism site never sees the ocean. Six more miles and it arrives at the Dead Sea, where it has another chance to leave by gift-shop bottle before it evaporates or simply remains, soaking up its legendary salt at its legendarily low elevation, in isolation from the rest of the world. The basin is “the lowest point on earth,” said Mkhjian, “the closest to heaven.”

The closest to heaven? It’s surely a holy place. But for those of us who don’t live there, is this our holy ground, our baptismal identity? The Jordan basin has a singular significance—geologically, historically, even geopolitically. But it is one thing to visit such a place and love it. It’s quite another to learn to love your own, comparatively ordinary place—and through it to love a whole world of interconnected ordinary places. “Through the baptism of your dear Son,” goes the famous “flood prayer” of Martin Luther, “you sanctified and set apart the Jordan and all waters as a blessed flood.” All waters, not just or even especially the Jordan.

My first child is a year old, and her Episcopalian mom and Lutheran dad haven’t had her baptized yet. This is due to practical issues, people’s schedules and the like. Yet part of me doesn’t mind waiting, because I wish all our children could have something we can’t yet offer them: a baptism in a place and a faith community where we’re growing deep roots, ideally a place with a natural body of water to center our baptismal life. Perhaps our neighborhood on the northwest side will become this long-term home; while we’ve never planned to stay for more than a couple of years, growing roots doesn’t always happen according to plan.

One thing we won’t be doing: baptizing her in the Chicago River. My church is right down the street, but when we go outside for baptisms it’s all the way to Lake Michigan, where the water is cleaner. There’s no good theological reason for baptismal water to be perfectly pure, of course. Purity, suggests Lathrop, is a value of the insular community, of the overly locative. Baptism is not a ritual purity bath so much as a subversion of the very concept, a paradoxical initiation rite that turns us toward the world’s uncleanness.

Still, a person’s baptism probably shouldn’t land her in the hospital, and I live in a place where the local water is, as the sign says, “not suitable for any human body contact.” At the Jordan, multi-faith groups are working to make the water more plentiful and more suitable. Perhaps one way for my family to grow roots where we’re planted is to get involved with similar efforts on behalf of our own waterway. A river is, after all, the very picture of water that both locates and liberates, that exists in a place but doesn’t stagnate there—the “living water” the Didache presents as the best option for baptism. And water that’s too dirty for a baptism is also too dirty to give life in more mundane, day-to-day ways.

But first-rate liturgical symbolism doesn’t make a good baptism, and neither does caring for the earth. God’s grace does—a grace that infuses the definitively holy water of every time and place. At the disappeared Lower Jordan, at the former site of a swimming pool, at whatever place my daughter is finally dunked or splashed three times—God moves in whatever water is available. God plants us in a place but also forms us for the life of other places, for the whole fragile, holy, water-soaked world. **CC**

An immigrant and the church where he lives

Sanctuary in Portland

by Gregg Brekke

REMOVING JACKETS soaked by the relentless October rains of the Pacific Northwest, supporters of Francisco Aguirre assemble in the sanctuary of Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon, warmly greet one another, and take seats on metal folding chairs at the front of the church.

It's October 17, four weeks since Aguirre arrived at Augustana seeking sanctuary and protection from the threat of arrest and deportation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers. Aside from quick smoke breaks just outside the door—accompanied by escorts—Aguirre hasn't left the building. Some good-natured badgering by one of these escorts leads Aguirre to say solemnly he's tried quitting many times. But at 35, the habit he picked up as a young orphan, captured by soldiers and forced into servitude during the Salvadoran civil war, is a hard one to break.

Francisco Aguirre fears for his safety if he is forced to return to his homeland.

Aguirre was deported from the United States once before. Yet he continues his struggle to obtain legal residency—instead of returning to a homeland where he has no connections and continues to fear for his safety.

Aguirre was six years old, playing in the dirt behind his family's home in El Salvador, he says, when a group of government soldiers arrived. They asked where his parents were, and Aguirre said they were in the house. Already searching inside, the soldiers found no trace of his parents. Aguirre says his parents fled when the soldiers arrived, unable to retrieve him in their haste to escape. They haven't been seen since and are assumed dead.

The soldiers took Aguirre back to their base and held him there, where he says they forced him to run errands, shine boots, and clean for the privilege of meals and a cot. For at least a year—Aguirre doesn't know the exact time frame—he rose before dawn with the soldiers and went to bed only when his chores were done. An orphanage group eventually took him and provided for his housing and education.

In 1995, Aguirre was 17 and working at a rice and bean

packaging plant when soldiers arrived looking for him. Although the war was over, the government was arresting those considered a threat. Aguirre says he hid among the storage silos. He finally came out when one of the soldiers, who had known Aguirre as a boy, addressed him with a childhood nickname. His friend had disobeyed orders in order to alert him: leave now, or the next time we come we'll have to arrest you.

With very little money and only the clothes on his back, Aguirre got permission to drive the plant's pickup truck to the Guatemalan border. He abandoned the truck there and began his first journey toward the United States.

He made it. In 1996, Aguirre began working as a day laborer in Portland. Eventually he found meaning in advising other migrant laborers—nearly all of them undocumented—on their rights as workers. He joined the Workers' Organizing Committee and began advocating for workers and educating them on legal protections in regard to employers, police, and ICE.

It was in this capacity that Aguirre says he offered two newly arrived migrants a place to stay one night in 1999. He said they could spend the night in his apartment and then look for more permanent accommodations in the morning.

Aguirre and his guests awoke to the sound of police at his door. They had been given a tip about the two migrants and came to make an arrest. In their search of the two migrants, the police say they found drugs. The two were taken away, and Aguirre was taken into custody, too. "After 15 days without seeing a judge, without charges, they set me free," he recalls. "I thought it would end right there, but it didn't."

Aguirre's houseguests were released at the same time he was, but he didn't know that. A month later, Aguirre says two plainclothes officers met him outside the school where he was learning English. They walked with him, asking if he knew where his houseguests were, suggesting that they would "make it easy" on Aguirre if he cooperated with them. Aguirre didn't know where they were; he didn't know them and explained that they had only spent one night at his apartment. Unsatisfied, the officers took Aguirre into custody again.

Aguirre's legal nightmare was beginning. He was held for three months and charged with 20 counts of drug trafficking and possession (later reduced to two counts of trafficking).

Gregg Brekke is a writer and visual journalist, and owner of SixView Studios (www.sixview.com).



SANCTUARY SEEKER: *Francisco Aguirre and one of his daughters reunited at Augustana Lutheran Church following a support rally at the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services office.*

His public defender said he would begin processing Aguirre's asylum application and advised him to plead no contest to the drug charges. In court, Aguirre entered his plea and asked about the status of his asylum request. The judge knew nothing of an asylum application, saying his lawyer wasn't qualified to make such a request. Aguirre's plea of no contest, the judge explained, did not exonerate him as he had been advised. It merely meant that he was not protesting the charges.

Aguirre recalls being in shock as the judge ordered him detained pending deportation. Why would his lawyer not defend him? Where was the evidence to support the drug trafficking and possession charges? What option did he have to stay in the United States?

For the next 15 months, Aguirre tried getting answers to these questions. But lawyers wouldn't return his calls from the immigration hold center, and requests for information on his case went unanswered.

On the deportation flight, Aguirre and the other detainees were restrained with handcuffs and leg shackles. As they neared El Salvador, he recalls wondering why the others were released and given sack lunches while he remained restrained. Then everyone else deplaned and met their waiting friends and family—while U.S. marshals continued to detain Aguirre.

With no living relatives and scarce memories of friends in his homeland, Aguirre hadn't anticipated a homecoming party. But neither had he imagined the Salvadoran federal police waiting to receive him. Upon exiting the plane, Aguirre was met by a sizable armed force. "They looked like a SWAT team," he says. Still shackled, Aguirre was escorted into a room inside the airport where he was interrogated for hours while a

secretary recorded his statement on a manual typewriter. Its click-clack sound is seared into his memory.

"Did you serve [in the Salvadoran civil war] as FMLN or as military?" he was asked repeatedly, an attempt to discern if he'd been allied with the coalition of guerrilla groups known as Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional or with the government forces. "Are you a drug trafficker?" they asked. "No," Aguirre replied, he'd never been involved in the drug trade.

Finally, Aguirre's shackles were removed, and he was released in the airport's ground transportation area. He had \$20 a friend in the States had given him, and he wasted no time in hiring a cab to take him back to the Guatemalan border. There was nothing for him in El Salvador—no relatives, no friends, no place to call home.

It took Aguirre just a month to get back to Arizona. He knew the route from his original migration to the United States. He posed as a priest to cross into the Mexican state of Chiapas before riding the dangerous gang-controlled north-bound freight trains known as "The Beast." He wasn't ashamed to ask for handouts, and he knew how to earn a few pesos by helping others. Returning to the United States was a matter of life and death.

Back at Augustana Lutheran this past October, Mark Knutson, the church's pastor, made introductions and emphasized to everyone in the circle the dual meaning of the word *sanctuary*. "A sanctuary is a place where people come to encounter the divine," he said. "Sanctuary is also a place of refuge, safe from all harm." Then he led the group in prayer.

Aguirre's sanctuary at Augustana began after a dozen ICE

officers arrived at his home the evening of September 19 seeking his arrest. Local police had recently charged Aguirre with “probable cause DUI,” and he believes the arrest information was passed on to ICE, prompting its action. (The Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office denies this.) Aguirre was already in the process of contesting the earlier arrest, challenging aspects of due process in a police force with a history of racial bias. He says he was frightened but composed, calling upon his decade of experience advising migrant workers.

Aguirre asked the ICE agents, wearing uniforms with no name badges, if they had a warrant for his arrest. They did not. One officer promised to stay until a warrant arrived, but as



PHOTO BY GREGG BREKKE

LOCAL SUPPORT: Area clergy pray with Francisco Aguirre at the “This Is Where I Belong” community rally held at Augustana Lutheran Church.

Though thankful to the church that shelters him, Aguirre wants to be “really free.”

friends of Aguirre’s came to the home and the night wore on, even this officer left. It was a window of opportunity that Aguirre and his companions seized.

Knutson was out of town, but he says that when he received the call requesting sanctuary at Augustana, there was no question that Aguirre was welcome. “We had been preparing for this”—receiving a sanctuary seeker—“for nearly 20 years,” he says.

Supporters whisked Aguirre away to Augustana, the sole sanctuary-providing church in Portland. ICE has promised not to make arrests in what they call “sensitive areas,” especially schools and places of worship. Aguirre, Augustana, and sup-

porting congregations in Portland are all committed to his sanctuary stay, to allowing due process to proceed on his civil conviction, to a stay in the deportation order, and to his request for a U visa (a visa for victims of serious crimes).

Aguirre’s time in sanctuary has been anything but glamorous. Many days he is alone, his only company the two escorts—out of dozens from area churches—who take shifts sitting vigilantly in Augustana’s basement or entrance 24 hours a day. Aguirre sleeps a lot during the day, haunted by worry-induced insomnia through the night. He worries about his court case and how he will provide for his family. He worries about colleagues at Voz Workers Education Program, an organization he cofounded, and how it will continue assisting day laborers at the Martin Luther King Jr. Workers Center.

Aguirre does what he can to help out around the church, and he serves as a deacon at Sunday services. He researches his case, talks with supporters, attends planning sessions, and stays in touch with other sanctuary seekers and organizers around the country. He dreams of being at home with his family.

His wife Dora and daughters Aranza (age four) and Aura Miranda (three) visit only on the weekends or during community rally events. It’s too far for the girls to travel back to their home in an east Portland suburb each day to attend preschool. In the midst of the chaos of meetings and frequent weekend visitors, the girls adore the attention from Aguirre, a doting father with a ready smile and hearty laugh.

Aguirre, however, makes no attempt to hide his despair at his situation. “I’m so thankful for all that Augustana and the others are doing for me and my family,” he says. “But it’s still a sort of prison, you know? All these people are doing so much, providing food and shelter and advocacy and safety, but I’m still not really free.”

The sanctuary movement began in the 1980s as civil wars raged throughout Central America, fueled by U.S. intervention. During and after these conflicts, hundreds of thousands of former fighters, politicians, educators, and civic organizers arrived in the States seeking political asylum. For those who

Free will in the late capitalist era

The long slow mills have no choice, the freeway has no choice. The empty fields have no choice, when the snow falls they agree to turn white and later muddy, when the sun burns they parch and crack, learn to be tough. What choice do I have, wakened at dawn, bleary and empty, except to stand up and totter on, slowly gather the pieces of myself, the day ahead ordinary or not, who will arrive and who depart, on the radio a new calamity far away. Eat something, drink something, pull on my shoes and coat and walk through the backyard of the brick house whose owners moved out months ago, the knobby grass soggy from the last rains, smelly gifts from the neighbors’ dogs hiding in the hollows. I have no choice and I’m one of the lucky ones, one of the last ones, who else will have such an easy sweet time of it, tucked into this town like a child into bed, free to leave any time I can afford it. What else can I do but slide my card in the slot, pull open the door, trudge up the stairs to the desk where the whole day is waiting?

Jeff Gundy

opposed the U.S.-backed forces that ultimately won control of their governments, a return to their home countries meant imprisonment or death. Seeing the plight of these asylum seekers—and U.S. culpability for it—churches began opening their doors to offer sanctuary to these refugees.

John Fife, pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, officially declared his congregation open for sanctuary on March 24, 1982, the second anniversary of Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero's assassination. More than 500 churches eventually participated in the movement, providing safe places for immigrants to avoid detention and deportation while their asylum requests were processed and adjudicated.

In the last 15 years, instances of refugees seeking sanctuary in churches have been more sporadic. When they do come up, the name "New Sanctuary" is often used to differentiate the movement from the many cases that resulted from the Central American civil wars. At present, 25 congregations in 18 U.S. cities identify themselves as prepared to offer sanctuary; they are joined by more than 70 supporting congregations.

Southside Presbyterian is once again hosting sanctuary seekers. Daniel Neyoy Ruiz and his family arrived at the church's doors on May 13, almost 30 years after Southside welcomed its previous sanctuary seeker. After 28 days, Ruiz received a stay of deportation; he remains in Tucson. A second sanctuary seeker arrived August 7. Southside pastor Alison Harrington characterizes Rosa Robles-Loreto and her

Aguirre says that he is not sure if Obama's immigration order will benefit him.

family as "a Little League family. They are as American as you can get." In contrast with Ruiz's relatively speedy release, requests for a stay of deportation for Robles-Loreto have been repeatedly denied.

"We have been witnesses to seeing families torn apart over and over," says Harrington. "Offering sanctuary helps us to live out our faith, to follow the promises of our faith." Noting the ten churches that are assisting Southside in accompanying sanctuary seekers, she adds that "sanctuary isn't confined to the context of the four walls of our church. It involves the whole community."

Noel Anderson, grassroots coordinator for immigrants' rights at Church World Service, believes that the actual number of congregations offering sanctuary and support is higher than reported. Anderson is in contact with movement organizers and with the six individuals currently finding sanctuary in churches—in Chicago, Denver, Portland, Tempe, and two in Tucson.

Anderson acknowledges some resistance within the faith community to those seeking sanctuary and political asylum. Because of the variety of reasons people enter sanctuary—from

wrongful convictions to domestic violence to fear of returning to a home country—he challenges the notion of offering support based on ideas of "good migrant vs. bad migrant."

"Just because someone makes a mistake it doesn't mean we should separate them from their family and livelihood," he says. With more than 1,000 deportations processed each day in the United States, Anderson views the faith community's actions as a response to the government's unwillingness to provide solutions for incorporating migrants into society.


Anderson says there is an urgent need for public debate on immigration and the impact of current policies. "Church World Service serves a lot of people who are trying to adjust their documentation status," he says. "Along with others, we're trying to structure communities to take a strong prophetic stand for those who are most impacted by current policies."

In Portland, support for Aguirre has poured in. An August 30 rally and prayer service attracted more than 300 people. Among these were at least 50 local clergy and community leaders, a representative from the Portland mayor's office, and city council member Nick Fish, all of whom expressed their support for Aguirre and a stay of deportation. Salvadoran congresswoman Emma Julia Fabian Hernández visited Aguirre October 20 to hear details of his sanctuary process and explore a political resolution to his visa request. A canceled October 22 U visa application appointment with the Portland office of U.S. Customs and Immigration Services turned into a rain-soaked rally and press conference with an estimated 100 in attendance.

On November 6, 45 days into his stay at Augustana, Aguirre reluctantly left sanctuary. Unable to obtain an appearance waiver, he was forced to attend a court hearing regarding his probable DUI charge or face additional charges for failure to appear. On arriving at the Clackamas County Courthouse, he was promptly arrested by ICE agents at the direction of the District of Oregon U.S. attorney. Charged with illegal reentry following his 2000 deportation, Aguirre was released two days later, his deportation order temporarily lifted pending a January 13 federal hearing.

Shortly after his release, Aguirre received news that the Obama administration was planning an executive order on immigration. But after the president's November 20 announcement of the details, Aguirre and his supporters are still left wondering how the order will affect his family. It's likely that his wife Dora qualifies for the new protections, since they have two U.S.-born children. But Francisco is being prosecuted on reentry charges, and he says that Obama's executive order "can benefit me or not. If they deny my U visa I'm applying for, I don't know how my case will turn out." Aguirre expects to remain in sanctuary until his federal hearing.

"I'll stay here as much time as is needed," he says. "I won't leave my kids behind. They'll have to force me to walk out of the church. My kids belong here, you know? This is their country. Why can't all the rights they are born with—the opportunity to go to school, to be somebody when they grow up. . . ." Aguirre trails off, overcome by emotion.

"There's no reason for them to go to a country where they don't belong," he continues. "They don't know anybody" in El Salvador. Neither does Aguirre: "I don't have anything." 

Philosopher John Caputo

A restless search for truth

FOR SEVERAL DECADES philosopher John Caputo has been mixing postmodern philosophy with Christian theology in books like *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, and most recently, *The Insistence of God*. He believes that the postmodern turn in philosophy can help Christians reckon with their particular moment in cultural and philosophic history and with the radical pace of change. He has a new book for nonacademic audiences called *Truth*.

Why did you start writing about esoteric postmodern theory for nonacademic audiences?

It began through contact with the emerging church movement. I realized that there were people trying to translate postmodern theory into practice. They were interested in contemporary philosophical hermeneutics, but they weren't professional academics. They didn't want to have to make a career of trying to understand Jacques Derrida. They needed a translator.

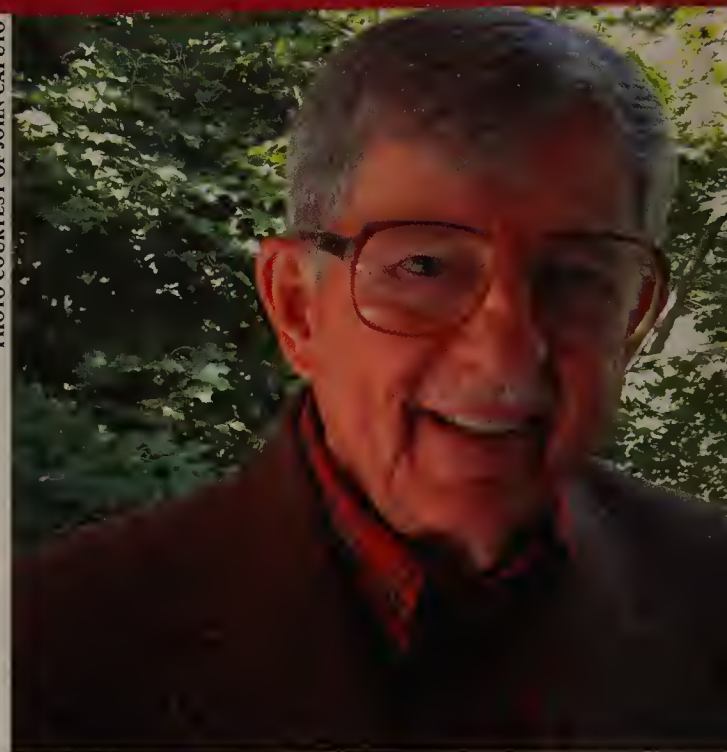
These people want to reach an intellectual clarity about what they are already doing. They have already, to some extent, figured it out in praxis, but they can use my work to help them articulate what they are already doing. It provides a vocabulary. They are already forming alternate communities, engaging in alternate practices, and playing minor chords in Christianity.

Where do you find these people?

These are people inside and outside the church who are restless with established religion. They are horrified by fundamentalism: its violence, its Grand Inquisitor purges. But they are also put off by mainstream religion. I have been invited to mainstream church discussion groups—ten years ago I would have been astonished at this—to meet with churchgoers who have not given up on going to church, but who secretly or not so secretly don't quite swallow the dogmas of the church.

Yet they do think that somehow religion should translate into practice: into communities of hospitality, peace, and justice, to provide support for people who have questions and doubts and are dubious about a big, encompassing story about the meaning of life. They take the official teachings of the church with a grain of salt. They think: if I were born somewhere else, I wouldn't be a Christian and that wouldn't make much of a difference. This is why I speak of religion without religion, where the name of God is the name of a call rather than the name of an entity.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN CAPUTO



I have a friend who is a member of a Catholic religious order who says he is a “lapsed Catholic.” I asked, “How does that work?” He said, “Well, I follow my community rule and I do what I am supposed to do, but I don't believe much of it any more.” “Why don't you leave?” I asked. He said, “The essence of my vocation is these kids.” He lives and works with really troubled children who live in impossible situations and are victims of terrible circumstances.

That's what Wittgenstein called a “form of life” and what Heidegger called our “mode of being in the world.” This friend sums up what I am trying to articulate. That's the kingdom of God, with or without churches.

Why did you decide to write a book called *Truth*? That sounds like something an 18th-century philosopher would do, but not a 21st-century one.

It happens that 2013 was the 150th anniversary of the London Underground, and Penguin had the idea of putting out a series of philosophical books in honor of this occasion that would employ the motif of transportation and that were short enough and written in an accessible style so people could read these books as they commuted on the Tube. They invited me to address the question of truth.

I have spent so much time trying to take the air out of the word *truth*, trying to debunk and deconstruct its absoluteness, its unchanging, eternal, and transhistorical aspects, that I had never said much in an affirmative way about what I think it does mean. I took this to be an invitation to do something that I wouldn't have necessarily thought of doing myself.

Transportation is also a central metaphor in your book. What is the relationship between transportation and truth?

Our nonstop travel has created a crisis in truth. With our modern transportation systems, we can travel almost anywhere, and with our modern information systems almost anything can travel to us. Truth is in constant transit. And it is unnerving. The fundamental difference between a liberal and a conservative, I think, is the stomach you have for the journey. Your willingness

to explore the unnamed; your willingness to expose yourself to the future, to put what you've inherited at risk for sights unknown and places unvisited. Our experience of truth is an experience of that constant mutation.

When Jacques Derrida would come to Philadelphia, I would say to him, "Let me take you on a tour. Let me show you the Liberty Bell or Valley Forge." But he didn't want to go. His way to explore a city was to walk until he got lost and then try to find his way back. In the process, he would discover all kinds of things. Both personally and as a philosopher, he thought that being genuinely lost and seeking something is a crucial part of the journey. We expose ourselves to the unknown and the unforeseeable. Truth is like that.

Why do you focus so much on Derrida and Augustine?

Derrida's heart is very close to Augustine's "restless heart" at the beginning of the *Confessions*. That restlessness is the soul of the search for truth. It is religious. The religion-secular divide does not hold up when you search for truth. We can see this same restless searching in many places, in an artist or in a scientist in front of some great mystery. This link between Augustine, a father of the church, and Derrida, an atheist and a Jew, bears endless reflection.

Human beings stand on the border between the knowable and the unknowable. The universe was a relatively knowable place in the 19th century; it was just a question of getting

enough research done to know it all. But in the 20th century, that concept of the closed containable universe shattered. Now in the 21st century, we have physicists talking about stuff that if a philosopher talked about it they would laugh him out of the room—things like alternate universes where every possibility is actualized, and infinite multiple universes. And it is the math that is leading them to say these things.

"Belief systems tend to rigidify faith."

What do you think religious people most need to know about truth from this point of view?

I think that postmodern theory is a way out of the modernist concept of truth, which kept everything locked up in boxes: religious and secular, public and private, subject and objective, fact and value. It opens up the space of truth and allows it to assume a more plastic form, and a richer mien, which is comfortable with ambiguity. Faith becomes a form of life, a way of doing the truth.

I make a distinction between faith and belief. Belief is a proposition, a creed formed by a council, leaders agreeing on a belief system. I don't think creeds are unimportant, but I think they rigidify. To be true to faith, you have to keep those things flexible and rec-

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ognize their contingency. What matters is the form of life, what Heidegger called our mode of being in the world. Belief systems don't capture this. They tend to congeal, contract, and rigidify faith. Faith is a deeper and more fundamental structure.

Are you saying that faith is somehow less specific than belief?

Faith is a form of life and so it also has a specific form. I wouldn't say that faith is more general; I would say it is deeper. It gets expressed in a specific form like liturgy. It is an exercise of the whole person: affective, bodily, performative. It is making the truth.

If we didn't have the specific historical religious traditions, we would be much the poorer for it. Without Christianity, we wouldn't have the memory of Jesus. We wouldn't have the

“Faith is an exercise of the whole person: affective, bodily, performative.”

books of the New Testament. You need these concrete, historical traditions that are the bearers of ancient stories and are cut to fit to various cultures. But I don't want to absolutize them or freeze-frame them. I don't think of one religion being true at the expense of another in a zero-sum game. I am not saying that if you burrow deeply enough under each religious tradition, you will find they are all the same. They are quite different. They are as different as the cultures and the languages out of which they come. There is an irreducible multiplicity.

This is one of the hallmarks of postmodernity: you can't boil everything down to one common thing. There are many ways of doing the truth. There can't be one true religion any more than there can be one true language. The truth of religion is not the truth of a certain body of assertions. It is not about a core set of agreements. That's not relativism, and it is not saying that there is nothing true in religion. It is saying that religious truth is not like the truth of mathematics. It is a different sort that is deeply woven together with a form of life.

In your book you say, “The future is always better.” What do you mean?

If you had to single out one of the theological virtues that would apply to postmodernism, it would be hope. Postmodernism has important things to say about faith, like the distinction between faith and belief. And love is important because postmodernism turns on love for the other. But I think that its keynote virtue is hope. It goes back to what we started by talking about: the true journey is exposed to the unforeseeable future. We put ourselves at risk for the future.

The world is transforming itself at such an unprecedented rate that we are terribly anxious about what is ahead. Today we have an acute sense of radical change. The virtue you need in that time is hope. Fear of the future needs to be answered with hope.

The future is unnerving. Things have changed more in the last 100 years than they had in the last 2,000, and the rate of acceleration is increasing. Imagine 1,000 years from now! People will look back on this time as just the beginning of a radical transformation. It is transforming what we mean by human life itself. It is just the beginning of something we can hardly imagine.



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Who are your theological or religious heroes?

For me, the most important theologian is Paul Tillich. Operating inside the confines of theology, he nails it for me when he says God is not a being. To the idea that God is the highest being, the proper theological response is atheism. Tillich is posttheistic: religion is found wherever there are people who probe the depths of being, people who address matters of ultimate concern. You either go with Tillich or against him—I go with him as far as I can.

As a Roman Catholic, I admire Hans Küng, who challenges the self-appointed and self-authorizing power grab of the Roman Catholic Church. Bonhoeffer is important because of the idea of religionless Christianity.

In the classical tradition, my heroes are the mystics: those men and women who give the established church trouble and are constantly harassed and martyred. Marguerite Porete is someone I have been reading more of lately, and I am deeply impressed by her. The very first book I ever wrote was on Meister Eckhart and Heidegger. There is a provocative resonance between the mystical tradition and the radical philosophical postmodern theory.

And there are many activists that are heroes of mine: the Berrigan brothers, Dorothy Day, and Desmond Tutu. People who translate this stuff into political action.

Ever since Mother Teresa published the book on her doubts, she has become a hero of mine. Before that I

admired her as a heroic woman who translated her faith into action. But in these letters to her confessor, she doubts everything except her work. Her work is the kingdom of God.

I don't think she abandoned her faith. The content of her religious beliefs began to waver while her confidence in her work never wavered. The name of God is not the name of a being; it is the name of the call.

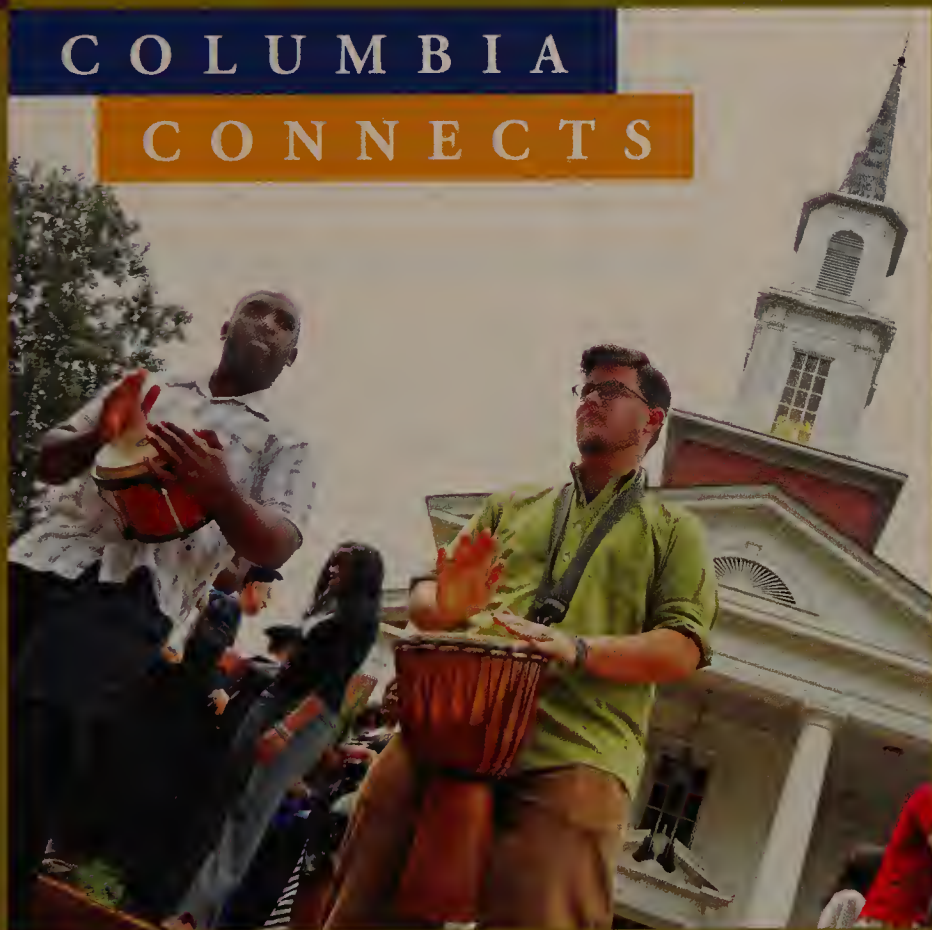
How do you yourself put this into practice?

I am an inveterate intellectual, so my practice will always be writing, thinking, and communicating. But my own personal community is Catholic. I grew up in a Catholic world, and I am intellectually and culturally formed by the Catholic intellectual tradition. I taught in a Catholic university for almost my entire career. My friends are leftist Catholics, wary of church authoritarianism. I am one of those people who is inside of a community with a certain amount of irony. I am a Catholic writer with an asterisk, although my critics might say, a dis-asterisk. The root word is, of course, *star*, and a disaster is when you lose your star. So I may be a Catholic with a dis-asterisk. Either way, I am saddened by the things done within the church and saddened when it is attacked from the outside. But I do love this new pope! He seems to have read the New Testament!

CC

— Amy Frykholm

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exploring faith, igniting imagination, renewing community

by Stephanie Paulsell

Christmas Eve visions

ON A CHRISTMAS EVE in the 12th century, a Benedictine nun named Elisabeth kept vigil in the church with her community. During the celebration of the Eucharist, she saw a woman sitting in the center of a bright, shining sun. The woman's hair fell over her shoulders, and the light from the sun around her filled the monastery where Elisabeth was praying and then gradually spread out to illuminate the entire world.

As Elisabeth gazed at the woman, a dark cloud moved in to obscure the rays of the sun, and the woman began weeping. Elisabeth's vision lasted all through the night of Christmas Eve, with the cloud moving in and out, the woman shining and weeping, the earth lightening and darkening.

On Christmas Day an angel appeared to Elisabeth, and she asked him who the woman was. She is the sacred humanity of Jesus, the angel explained, and the sun is the divinity that holds Christ's humanity and illuminates it.

It's hard to imagine a better time to have a vision of the humanity of Jesus in all its beauty and compassion than Christmas Eve, one of the most visual liturgical celebrations of the year. Elisabeth saw her visions in contemplative trances, but any Christmas Eve service can fill our eyes with the humanity of Jesus: children in their shepherd robes and angel wings; families, friends, and strangers wedged together into pews; the illumination of a face when one person turns to light the candle of another. Elisabeth saw humanity lit by divinity on Christmas Eve, and so do we.

Elisabeth's vision is not just a vision of light, however, but also of darkness and despair. Christ's humanity shines in glory in Elisabeth's vision but also weeps and grieves. Elisabeth's vision captures the joyful mystery of the incarnation, but it also captures the sorrows carried in the Christmas story: the weary couple needing shelter; the mothers left inconsolable when Herod murders their children; the journey to his own death this newborn child seems already to have begun. As Elisabeth understood, our sorrows and the world's sorrows are part of Christmas Eve too.

The threads of sadness that run through the Christmas story extend into life in our present time. Weary travelers are still refused shelter, the innocent are still slaughtered, Rachel still mourns her children. Our culture's frenetic approach to Christmas muffles those realities, distracts from them, and aims to keep us cheerful. But in the dark silence of Christmas Eve we hold and remember those realities. As we keep vigil with Elisabeth, we know that a little baby has been born into a broken world, and we lift our candles together to bear witness to a light we hope the darkness cannot overcome.

The mystery of the incarnation blesses both the sacredness of our embodied life and, in Elisabeth's vision, the vulnerability of God's life. When the cloud obscures the light of divinity, the woman who is Christ's humanity begins to weep. Elisabeth describes her weeping as copious and profuse, reflecting a grief that is wholly inhabited, wholly felt. When the light of divinity is clouded over, it is the tears of Christ's compassionate humanity that shine instead.

Elisabeth's vision was apparently troubling to some. Before her vision was recorded, someone directed her to ask her heavenly messengers why Christ's humanity did not appear in a masculine form. When John the Evangelist appeared to her a few days after Christmas, Elisabeth dutifully asked and received an answer: Jesus' humanity appeared to you in feminine form, John told her, so that she could also represent Jesus' mother.

Elisabeth took John's "also" very seriously. But rather than replacing the original interpretation with the new one, she kept both in her book of visions, letting them both be true. In her

The world's sorrows are part of Christmas Eve too.

vision, Christ's humanity shines forth as a woman and as a mother, and knits him ever more deeply into the fabric of human life. By adding an interpretation without subtracting one, Elisabeth invites us to imagine the multiple forms Christ's humanity takes, the many faces out of which we see it shine.

Every Christmas Eve is an opportunity to see anew the humanity of Jesus: the babe in the manger, the mother exhausted from labor, the father trying to figure out what to do next. The children making their way to the border. The young man lying dead for hours in the street. The girls from Chibok, the Yazidi women. The person next to us in the pew who turns to light our candle with hers. Christ's humanity is around us and within us, on this night and every night, waiting to be recognized.

When we lift our candles during "Silent Night," we honor the light that shines in the darkness, a light that unflinchingly shows us the world as it is and offers us a vision of what the world might become. In the space in between, it's our work to look for the humanity of Christ in the humanity of each other, and to protect, nurture, and cherish it in all the forms it takes.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

Words and wilderness

by Cindy Crosby

My backpacking trips have been alternately miserable and glorious, harsh and enlightening. Occasionally I've gotten in over my head (once I wound up with hypothermia while wearing cotton in a thunderstorm), and at other times the aftermath of a hike in the backcountry has been downright painful (like when I lost toenails after a 33-mile trip in too-new, too-small boots).

Regardless of the challenges, such times away without frills or distractions are touchstones for remembering who I am. I carry everything I need on my back. No laptop, no phone, and especially no books. Even paperbacks are too heavy in an already overloaded pack when something as light as my toothbrush must be scrutinized for weight.

But after reading Belden Lane's *Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice*, I'm tempted to begin toting a tome or two. For Lane, backpacking is more than just a hike in the great outdoors. It's a chance to explore words that invite us more deeply into the spiritual life. What Lane seeks in the wilderness, he says, is not exercise or escape. Rather, he is looking for the physical and spiritual depth of intimacy that the combination of words and wilderness provides.

"I'm moved by nature's power and beauty, but what sets me afire is the *longing* I sense there of everything else wanting to connect, the desire for an intimacy that is as alluring as it is frightening," writes Lane. In search of connections between sensuous spirituality and earthy experiences, he reads spiritual texts while camping under the stars.

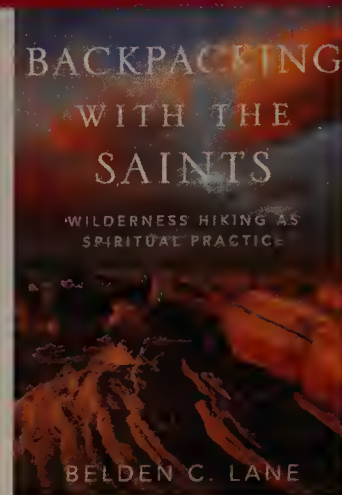
Lane, who describes himself as "an absentminded professor with ADD, inat-

tentive to little things," is professor of theological studies at Saint Louis University. From time to time he heads for the Missouri Ozarks and straps on his backpack. It's an antidote for Lane to any sense of self-importance. "Exposure to the harsh realities and fierce beauties of a world not aimed at my comfort has a way of cutting through the self-absorption of my life," he explains. Backpacking puts the ego in check, grounds our souls, enforces discipline. "It reminds me, in short, that spiritual practice—far from being anything ethereal—is a highly tactile, embodied, and visceral affair."

Lane argues that displacement—reading the saints and encountering familiar and unfamiliar texts in out-of-the-way places—often prompts new insights. As he did in a previous book, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, he peoples his spiritual geography with rich diversity. He looks to many traditions—Celtic, Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Sufi, and Hindu—to illustrate his points. Jean Pierre de Caussade reminds Lane to be attentive; John Bunyan reinforces the importance of simplicity. Søren Kierkegaard's words are permeated with knowledge of the solitary life; Dag Hammarskjöld knows how to travel lightly; and Thich Nhat Hanh's writings encourage him as he strives for mindfulness.

Nature lovers will find familiar writers such as Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams, and Gary Snyder sprinkled throughout the chapters like raisins in trail mix. There are plenty of tantalizing excerpts and snippets from various books to send you straight to the nearest library or bookstore.

Risk taking is part of the package of hiking the backcountry. Risk, Lane tells



Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice

By Belden C. Lane

Oxford University Press, 288 pp., \$24.95

us, is also intrinsic to the life of the spirit. We may find ourselves cowering under cover as a grizzly methodically tears apart a backpack, as writer Paul Gruchow did in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Or you might end up like I did, shivering and disoriented after a seven-mile hike across a slippery rock face in a driving, cold rain or listening to 50 mile per hour winds topple trees near your tent on a wilderness island. Our best-laid plans often go astray on wilderness outings; likewise, our plans for our spiritual lives sometimes come to grief. After forgetting his tent fly and spending a night in the rain, Lane reflected on the correlation between "stupidity and wisdom on the learning curve of backcountry experience." There are no guarantees that backpacking will lead to spiritual growth. "Far from building character, the wilds sometimes simply terrify," Lane writes. But, as he adds later in the book, "mindfulness is a rigorous practice of welcoming the moment, whatever it brings."

A life of theological reflection is also not entirely safe if we internalize what we read and learn. When we read the words of the saints, listen, and let go of our preconceptions, we risk personal transformation. Lane says that the desert

Cindy Crosby is a wilderness backpacker, kayaker, and recent contributor to *The Tallgrass Prairie Reader* (University of Iowa Press). She lives in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

Christians warn us that we will be wounded in our wilderness journeys. "But in the process, you may discover your greatest joy in having survived the night, in finding resources you never knew you had, falling back on a strength that was more than yours."

OK, I ask myself again, why do I want to take a book with me into the wild? Wilderness reading, Lane argues, is different from reading in a room with walls. You pause more often to attend to the call of a bird or the wind moving through the trees. Place influences how you imbibe text. "The book of nature communicates a danger and beauty that stirs the senses, opening the soul to a corresponding truth found in the text of scripture."

He makes a compelling case. After listening to Lane, I'm already making room in my pack for one of the books he recommends. Lane tells me that the mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *The Divine Milieu* is small enough to fit into a pocket. Still, I will have to leave something else at home to make room for it. Who needs a toothbrush when you can have enlightenment?

The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart

By Mark Achtemeier
Westminster John Knox,
156 pp., \$17.00 paperback

I first met Mark Achtemeier in one of the committee rooms at a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly in the mid-1990s. We were on opposite sides of a perennial issue for Presbyterians: whether the church's ban on gay ordination should be codified in the denomination's constitution.

At that point Achtemeier had become one of the most vigorous and articulate spokespersons for the conservative cause in Presbyterian circles, a frequent keynote speaker at national church gatherings of Presbyterians for Renewal and other evangelical groups, and one of the chief defenders of church orthodoxy on matters of sexual purity.

*Reviewed by Scott D. Anderson, executive director
of the Wisconsin Council of Churches.*

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After leaving the Presbyterian ministry because I had been outed as a gay man in 1990 by two members of the congregation I served, I soon became an advocate for change in the denomination. At the time I met Achtemeier, I was national co-moderator of the More Light Presbyterians.

When we exchanged pleasantries in the heat of legislative battle at that General Assembly, neither of us could have imagined that 16 years later Achtemeier would be preaching at my ordination as the first openly gay, partnered candidate for the Presbyterian ministry under a new church policy Achtemeier helped create. Nor could we have dreamed that he would become one of the leading spokespersons in the denomination favoring church blessing of same-sex marriage.

How did this remarkable conversion happen? *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart* is Achtemeier's account of the journey. Part memoir and part theological treatise, Achtemeier's spiritual travelogue chronicles each step along his path

with grace, humility, and pastoral sensitivity. Written as a first-person narrative, it unpacks complex theological topics in an accessible, nontechnical way. Conservative Christian lay readers struggling to understand LGBT sexuality and marriage are clearly his target audience.

Books by evangelicals about same-sex relationships typically begin with the so-called clobber texts—the seven passages of scripture that mention same-sex behavior—then build a hermeneutical and theological framework around these texts that lead conservative authors to support traditional church teaching and its practical application, namely celibacy, in the lives of LGBT believers.

Achtemeier moves in the opposite direction. He begins with his experience of gay and lesbian Christians: friends, acquaintances, and students at Dubuque Seminary, where he taught theology for 15 years. He found the practical application of traditional church teaching leading his LGBT circle of companions into despair, self-hatred, and anger at God, which didn't square with what he contends are the fruits of the Christian life. This cognitive dissonance sent Achtemeier back to the Bible with a set of foundational theological questions that had largely been missing from church debates on sexuality.

Using five Reformed principles of biblical interpretation, Achtemeier avoids the trap of proof-texting individual passages and instead begins his hermeneutical journey by looking for a coherent message in the full sweep of the biblical story, the big picture of the nature of God.

One of the most interesting aspects of Achtemeier's interpretive frame is his focus on the intent of scriptural teaching. Drawing from Calvin's exposition of the Ten Commandments in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Achtemeier conveys his understanding of the purposes of God that stand behind biblical law:

What are the highest purposes that emerge in the Bible for love, sex and marriage? Why did God invent these gifts and make them a part of human life? What was God trying to accomplish in creating human beings with the capacity of entering into these experiences? What purposes did God have in mind for our use and enjoyment of these gifts?

Achtemeier then constructs a thoroughly traditional theology of Christian marriage from his Reformed perspective, identifying throughout the biblical witness God's self-giving love as the basis for Christian marriage. The purpose of marriage, Achtemeier concludes, "is to grow into a deeper and richer experience of the joy, passion and fulfillment that come with giving ourselves wholly to one another in accordance with the pattern of Christ's self-giving love."

Can this understanding of Christian marriage apply to same-gender relationships? Achtemeier answers affirmatively. But what about procreation? Achtemeier finds no biblical warrant for excluding childless couples; instead, he highlights the biblical understanding of

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JOHN 1:25

Rev. Steven Houck

believers as adopted children of God to support gay couples as adoptive parents. Male and female anatomy? Although Achtemeier affirms gender complementarity as the normative pattern for Christian marriage, he cites numerous biblical examples in which God delights in confounding standard expectations and conferring blessing outside the conventional, majority ways of doing things—most notably in the birth of Jesus and the conversion of the gentiles.

In the concluding chapters of the book, Achtemeier applies his theology of marriage to the clobber texts, seeking to understand each one in the context of the larger biblical witness. Then, in his chapter “Testing the Spirits,” he dismantles the slippery-slope arguments raised in conservative rhetoric, debunking the idea that same-sex marriage will lead us down the path of support for extramarital relations, polygamy, incest, or sexual relations with children.

The strength of this book may also be its greatest weakness. In making his theological framework for marriage accessible to a general Protestant audience, he may be limiting its appeal. Achtemeier misses a fuller treatment of the variety of ways scripture views marriage, for example, and he does not fully unpack the role of natural law in Roman Catholicism, which has implicitly shaped church teaching on marriage for centuries. I also doubt that many evangelicals outside the mainline traditions will look favorably on Achtemeier’s interpretive worldview. However, the insightfulness of his biblically grounded approach should spark deeper reflection on the conventional Christian wisdom about marriage among thoughtful conservatives.

If you’re looking for an introductory text that takes a high view of scripture and argues for the appropriateness of Christian marriage for same-gender couples, Achtemeier’s is the book I heartily recommend. Its clarity, disarming simplicity, and gracious tone will make it a welcome book not only for the pastor’s library and adult study classes, but for LGBT believers and their families who feel estranged from the church.

The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity

By Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel
Oxford University Press, 288 pp., \$35.00

In *The Deconstructed Church*, two veteran sociologists of religion give us our most extensive, comprehensive, and revealing ethnographic study of the worldwide phenomenon known as the emerging Christian movement, or as they abbreviate it, the ECM. Though so-called emerging Christians despise definitions and generalizations about themselves, the authors begin with a helpful definition: “The ECM is a creative, entrepreneurial religious movement that strives to achieve social legitimacy and spiritual vitality by actively disassociating from its roots in conservative, evangelical Christianity.”

Through participant observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews, surveys, and reading in the burgeoning literature of the emerging Christian movement, Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel studied the worldwide network of thousands of emerging congregations and their participants (emerging Christians don’t like to be called members of congregations—sounds too boringly institutional). Though ECM congregations do not yet account for a significant segment of Christianity, they may be the most fascinating, fresh development in the church in our time and our area of Christendom.

The key lens through which Marti and Ganiel view the emerging Christian movement is that of deconstruction. While there is much diversity, one thing unites: a conviction—in a movement suspicious of convictions—that the church in its big, mainline, evangelical, and Roman Catholic forms is not right. Emerging Christians are living out Jacques Derrida’s comment that “Christianity is the only mad religion” and that it “survives by deconstructing itself.”

The ECM is mostly a movement that

Reviewed by William H. Willimon, professor of the practice of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School.

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defines itself against the way that many of us have done church, but a few mainline denominations are attempting to integrate some of the movement into themselves. I am the pastor of a traditional, aging United Methodist congregation that, with my encouragement, has just invited a hip ECM congregation into our building to do their Sunday evening Eucharist-on-sofas, candles, and jazz thing. I hope we catch some of what they've got.

In many ways, this is a very hopeful book. I, who often lament the stolid, ossified nature of my own church, found it an invigorating reminder that the church can be one of the most adaptive, supple institutions in history in its fluid, deconstructing, reconstructing inventiveness. And yet this book is also a bit scary to a bishop like me who was produced by and has spent my life serving the church that the ECM means to deconstruct.

The authors call the pastoral leaders of these new congregations "religious, institutional entrepreneurs." I don't know whether ECM pastors would be flattered by the designation, but after we meet them in this book, the title of entrepreneur really works. Not content just to complain about the hidebound nature of the church, these anti-institutional ecclesiastical go-getters are busy reinventing the church, one small group of mostly young adults at a time. Hanging out in pubs, warehouses, and basements and engaging in endless conversation, ECM participants share a suspicion of authority and hierarchy. They like flat leadership and a leisurely, stripped-of-narrative eucharistic worship. They seem less focused on mission and evangelism than on critique of establishment Christianity; they do not so much reject traditional forms of Christianity as leave them behind.

In many ways the ECM is a picture of the spiritual aspirations of a generation. In Marti and Ganiel's study 69 percent of the respondents were under age 36. Ninety-five percent had some college education. Half were single, and more than two-thirds had no children. They described themselves as "exiles, refugees, and outcasts of established churches."

ECM participants dislike the neo-Calvinism of John Piper and Mark Driscoll as much as they like the "generous orthodoxy" of Brian McLaren, who

thrills the ECM by describing himself as "post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, charismatic/contemplative, Anabaptist/Anglican, depressed-yet-hopeful," and so on. The diverse ECM gang of Tony Jones, Nadia Bolz-Weber (with whom I've partied but not worshiped), Rob Bell, Phyllis Tickle (how does somebody my age get to be so admired by the ECM?), Doug Gay, and Jay Bakker (son of Jim and Tammy Faye) are sources for their free-range ecumenism.

Tony Jones, one of the most interesting of the ECM theologians, refers to the Bible as a helpful "member of the community" rather than an authoritative text to which we ought to submit. Jones puts down traditional preaching as "speeching" and instead favors what he calls "implicatory dialogue." Jones's book *The Church Is Flat* is a manifesto for the non-hierarchical leadership style of the ECM. I like that Jones is willing to define what he is doing; some emerging Christians' unwillingness to designate and define what they're doing seems like a possible evasion of intellectual responsibility. "I'm a religious mutt," brags one enthusiastic participant. "Yeah, I guess I'm Christian," says another, "but probably not in the way you mean." When asked what the point of their worship is, one ECM leader says, "to give a safe space where everybody can respond to God however they want."

I really tried to read this book with as much generosity as I could muster, overlooking the fact that I am a representative of the type of church the ECM is out to defeat. And yet I join with Marti and Ganiel in asking whether in its deconstruction, the ECM is constructing anything of lasting value. It may succeed at being a counter to the institutional church, but can it be sure that it's not just the latest phase of Western Christianity's capitulation to the culture? Just as United Methodism has institutionalized some of the pathologies of my generation, isn't it possible that the ECM will institutionalize the cultural captivity of the limited world of twenty- and thirtysomethings? How far can a church take what one sociologist calls "cooperative egoism"?

Though the authors are sociologists from whom one does not expect much theological reflection, the theologian in

me had to ask, “When does ‘what works for me’ become a perversion of the gospel rather than a charitable adaptation to the spiritual yearnings of a generation?” It’s fine to avoid judgmentalism and to construe Christianity as mostly a practice that you do rather than ideas to which you assent, but if you don’t at some point engage issues of truth and falsehood, how do you ever enjoy the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can you be sure that your gospel is not just good old American consumeristic narcissism made hip? Go ahead and put down modernist “propositional truth,” but why should contemporary, Western personal experience trump Christian tradition as well as the witness of global Christianity? I’ll admit that despite my weekly harangues, my church is bourgeois to the core. But how is your version of church more than an idealistic, spiritual playground for the young adult kids of the upper-middle class?

Marti and Ganiel are pretty sure that the ECM is more than a passing fad. Yet it has hitched its wagon so limitedly to one generation. How are they going to keep this thing going? The ECM congregation that my church is hosting came to us because they woke up one day and realized that they suddenly had children without anywhere to care for them during worship. They also wanted to hitch on to our church’s extensive mission involvement rather than begin their own. Perhaps there is a possibility that the old mainline and the new ECM will mesh in some way after all.

I wish the authors had done more to explore the spiritual diversity of the twenty- and thirtysomething age group and asked why the ECM doesn’t appeal to (and indeed evokes hostility from) some in that demographic. At Duke Divinity School, for every student who arrives as a bright young Baptist evangelical only to graduate as part of the ECM, there are a half dozen others who emerge as smells-and-bells Episcopalians. The ECM crowd seems intent on being not-your-mama’s church, but what about all those young adults who seem to find joy in the rites and the guidance of their great-great-grandparents’ saints?

“That’s just what I would have expected a mainline bureaucrat your age to say,” respond the kids of the ECM.

Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins [2nd edition, revised and expanded]

By Miguel A. De La Torre
Orbis, 384 pp., \$35.00 paperback

At such ideologically and politically charged times as these it is almost impossible to discern what a life of Christian faithfulness looks like. Christians who are claimed by the gospel and grounded in Christ fall into promoting diametrically opposing perspectives on issues such as poverty, immigration, the use of force, and ethics at the end of life. Those of us searching for common ground have a good resource in Miguel De La Torre’s *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. The author’s premise is that the biblical message of a life of faithfulness and salvation through Christ points toward the centrality of the poor and marginalized for a Christian understanding of social transformation and liberation. For De La Torre, “Christian liberative ethics becomes the process by which the mechanisms that dehumanize life, as well as cause death, are dismantled.”

Using the hermeneutical circle of observation, reflection, prayer, and case study, De La Torre invites us to look at Christian living as the task of continuing Jesus’ liberating mission for all people, the oppressed and the oppressor alike. Two specific acts define this activity. First we must choose a location on the margins from which to engage human action in all its spheres (political, economic, cultural, and social; local, national, and global). This will lead us to view the suffering and oppression of people on the margins—as well as the concomitant dehumanization of the dominant culture—as something that is against God and in need of liberation. Second, we must uncover and dismantle the systems of domination and exploitation that contribute greatly to the suffering of groups such as migrants, African Americans, American Indians, and LGBTQ people.

More specifically, De La Torre invites us to uncover the ways in which oppression, racism, immigration laws, and fiscal

abuse such as tax evasion and toxic mortgages are implemented to normalize and morally validate the dominant group’s interests and life situations over against those of the marginalized. Because of these systems the lives of the powerful and dominant come to be seen as morally valuable and normative, while the poor are seen as immoral. De La Torre writes:

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Christians of the dominant culture, while truly wishing to remain faithful to their religious convictions, at times construct ethical perspectives to preserve their power, defining their self-serving ethical response as Christian.

According to De La Torre, Christians, whether from dominant or oppressed groups, cannot assume that they are working for peace, justice, equity, and the beloved community if they do not first engage in the hard work of dismantling the very assumptions and systems that sustain a powerful center while oppressing the margins.

Those familiar with the hermeneutical circle of see-judge-act developed in Catholic social thought during the mid-20th century will recognize it in De La Torre’s process of observation, reflection, prayer, case study, and action. “The purpose of the hermeneutical circle is to formulate a praxis—a system of Christian ethics—to change the reality faced by those living on the margins of society.” When grounded in the perspectives of marginalized people, the process of observation and reflection demands deep engagement with their realities, identification of the historical and current forces that result in marginalization, and work alongside the poor in the praxis of liberation, which transforms hearts and relationships between oppressors and the oppressed.

De La Torre applies this hermeneutic to issues ranging from global economic relations and poverty to political funding, women’s rights, and the environment. Each section of the book introduces historical relationships of injustice

Reviewed by M. T. Dávila, who teaches Christian ethics at Andover Newton Theological School.

and power as the context in which Christian ethics must help us decide how to engage the challenges of liberation, justice making, and relationship building. Readers will marvel at the level of detail and depth with which De La Torre approaches each topic, documenting the issue at hand from the perspective of the poor while remaining attentive to those who have traditionally been the winners of the policies and politics of the dominant culture. The first edition of the book, which appeared in 2004, analyzed an expansive list of situations. The 2014 edition updates every section to include the most recent events shaping and challenging the Christian imagination in the United States, such as the 2008 economic crash, anti-immigrant policies implemented since 2004, the current state of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action.

As a Christian and an ethicist, I read this volume wondering whether I have ever paid as much attention to any particular issue as De La Torre does. He uncovers the ways in which policies can mount against the poor, the unceasing lobbying by those in power to retain their power and wealth, and particular stories of lives affected by the military industrial complex and by the longstanding protections afforded to corporations and their executives as the “job creators.” For example, De La Torre’s analysis of national poverty includes deep discussion of the ever-increasing inequality of wealth in the United States, of how race and gender have historically affected access to wealth-creating mechanisms, of corporate welfare before and after 2008, of the struggle to raise the minimum wage and the effects of raising a family on the minimum wage, and of the challenges of access to adequate housing for a growing number of people in the United States.

De La Torre’s ethical analysis hinges on how we understand wholeness and relationship as expressed in the relationships Jesus sought to edify and those he sought to dismantle or highlight as oppressive, such as that between the rich man and Lazarus. In light of these stories, the reader is asked to consider how policies promoted as good for the economy

in reality end up tearing away at human relationships by rewarding some and punishing the rest. One of De La Torre’s case studies is based on the 2011 discussion on the national budget and tax revenues, which was partly informed by Warren Buffett’s op-ed stating that he pays a lower tax rate than his secretary. All the while, De La Torre craftily integrates these detailed and deep discussions with the dynamics of oppression and domination that shape and influence ethical reflection done from the perspective of the dominant culture.

Readers will definitely be challenged to think ethically beyond the headlines or commentary by talking heads on news networks, to consider how current events are shaped by historical relationships of power and domination. Even more challenging is De La Torre’s careful deconstruction of how Christians have baptized domination as divine right and favor for groups in power.

De La Torre accents the difference between church mission efforts that deliver charitable aid and public witness for justice that links our own destiny with that of the poor, with whom we unite in solidarity for social transformation. The former answers to a central call of the biblical message: love of neighbor. The latter responds to the call to live by a common and shared humanity, in imitation of the God who became incarnate amid our suffering in order to transform it through bonds of love.

Though this volume is rich in detail, it does not discuss specific issues that are key to Christian ethical analysis, such as the relationship between church and state; the role of the state in caring for, ensuring access to, and protecting the common good; and how the Christian message contributes to an understanding of human rights. De La Torre clearly invites readers who are truly committed to doing Christian ethics from the margins to dismantle any previous notions about such issues and instead to construct our own theories of what the Christian message requires. But I would have paid a little more and read a little longer to see how De La Torre himself would construct these very important concepts in Christian thought. Maybe in a third edition.

BookMarks

Signs: Seven Words of Hope

By Jean Vanier

Paulist Press, 144 pp., \$14.95 paperback

Vanier is a man of wisdom who writes profoundly and with clarity. He speaks from a lifetime of embodying the gospel through the formation of L’Arche communities he’s established throughout the world, where able-minded people live together with and learn from people with intellectual disabilities. *Signs* contains short essays on seven themes: humiliation, awakening, encounter, authority, community, vulnerability, and mystery. While each chapter is a gem, the one on community is particularly pertinent given Vanier’s experience. He doesn’t gloss over the difficulties, yet he points a way toward breaking down walls that separate people, a way that yields real communion with others and offers hospitality to those on the outside.

Changing Our Mind

By David P. Gushee

Read the Spirit Books, 158 pp.,

\$16.95 paperback

The paradigms we use to explain reality collapse when we encounter too many anomalies. Then we begin to seek another explanation. Something like that has happened for many people in connection with homosexuality. That number now includes David P. Gushee, a leading evangelical ethicist. In his case, it was discovering that his sister is a lesbian that led him to rethink this issue. After previously defending a traditional, evangelical perspective on same-sex orientation, he now makes a passionate case for the full inclusion of LGBT persons in family, church, and community. He’s particularly attuned to the tragic lives of teens struggling with their sexual identity. He ends the book with an apologetic confession to those members of the LGBT community who were hurt by his previous teaching.

Leaving guyland

In *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Michael Kimmel writes about cultural pressure on young men to obey rules that prohibit them from showing emotion or any sign of weakness. Movies and stories for little boys tend to train them to act according to this concept of what it means to be male. In much of popular culture, men are reduced to animals, to testosterone, with little room to acknowledge themselves as God's image bearers.

But there are glimmers of hope.

The animated film *Big Hero 6* opens with a boy named Hiro who gets himself into mortal peril in the sort of truncated "guyland" where emotion is forbidden and violence glorified. The setting is a city called San Fransokyo, where big, dangerous men are betting big, dangerous money on robot fights. Hiro slips in with a feigned wide-eyed innocence and a remarkable little robot he has built.

Hiro is a prodigy, but he's a cynical one. His brother Tadashi wants more for

him, and drags Hiro into the engineering lab where Tadashi is a student. Seeing the "nerd lab" and the delightful nerds in it converts Hiro. His imagination is sparked, and he wants to go to school. This sounds preachy and manipulative, but Disney's animation studio pulls it off by doing what it does best: display the lure and power of imagination.

The nerd lab is a den of intellectual and physical delights. It's full of Tadashi's quirky friends—male and female—following their hearts' desires and inventing beautiful things. Hiro is intrigued by Tadashi's project—an inflatable health-care robot named Baymax that looks like a giant marshmallow and is programmed to nurture and heal.

We viewers are able to keep believing in these kids and their creative efforts because the movie doesn't turn Hiro into a corporate drone; it plays on all that's most fun in the boy movie genres. It provides superheroes and crime-fighting tech, a villain, and a revenge story. Who doesn't want a superhero suit perfectly

suited to one's research interests? There's fire and battle.

But the central task for Hiro and his friends isn't to get the bad guy; it's for Hiro to overcome the limiting boundaries of guyland. He's tempted to adopt the violence that powers the villain. He's tempted to shut down emotion and relationships. But he overcomes these temptations. Hiro is not, finally, the hero of the story—it takes a team of smart, brave friends to explode guyland and find something bigger and better.

The film is visually and emotionally imaginative and expansive. It plays with genre and disrupts it in ways that just might inspire boys to expand instead of to shrink. When I asked my son what he liked about *Big Hero 6*, he said, "Everything."

In that, I find hope. Rather than whittling off bits of our children, *Big Hero 6* might encourage them to expand into the full human beings God created them to be.

The author is Beth Felker Jones, who teaches theology at Wheaton College.



TEAMING UP: Prodigy Hiro faces his companion Baymax, a giant care-giving robot created by his big brother, Tadashi.

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by Philip Jenkins

Forgotten genocides

Twenty years ago, in July 1995, Serbian forces killed some 8,000 Muslims in and around the Bosnian town of Srebrenica. That was by no means the only such instance of interreligious violence and ethnic cleansing in modern times, especially along the tectonic fault lines that divide Christians and Muslims. One can note, for example, the Armenian Genocide during the First World War and the carnage wrought by modern-day Islamists in Iraq and elsewhere.

But there is another, critical side of the story, one scarcely known in the West. Repeatedly along those religious frontiers Christian forces perpetrated massacres of Muslims and even acts of genocide. Those largely forgotten crimes shaped the religious geography.

With some allowance for minorities, most Westerners think of Europe as historically Christian and the Middle East as overwhelmingly Muslim. Such a division would have astonished observers as late as 1900. From the 16th century through the 20th, even when Ottoman Turkey ruled the Middle East and the Balkans, much of that region was very diverse in faith as well as ethnicity. Instead of today's fairly homogeneous Middle East, we would do better to think of a religiously complex region extending from the Danube to the Euphrates, from Belgrade to Baghdad. Our modern religious map is a product of decades of violence and eth-

nic cleansing during which Christians were driven out of the Middle East and Muslims from Europe.

Ottoman control of south-eastern Europe crumbled gradually in the 19th century. Wherever the imperial frontier retreated, Muslim residents were targeted for persecution and ethnic cleansing. Communities several million strong were eliminated, mainly by expulsion and forced migration but also through pogroms. The process took roughly a century, from the 1820s through the 1920s.

One extraordinary example occurred during the Greek revolution that erupted in 1821. Throughout the country, the insurgent peasant population slaughtered tens of thousands of Muslims in the space of a few weeks—so thoroughly that the memory of whole communities was obliterated. Many thousands more Muslims perished during the conquest and sack of Ottoman-held cities, such as Tripolitsa and Navarino. Bishops and priests urged on their flocks to annihilate their ancient enemies.

In this bloody conflict neither side observed anything like what we would today regard as the laws of civilized warfare. But Greek Christians did undertake what we can only call a campaign of genocide. So also did the Russians as they expanded their empire into the newly conquered Caucasus. Following their

defeat of the Circassian Muslims in the 1860s, the Russians expelled several hundred thousand, and tens of thousands died in the process.

Christian revolts against Ottoman authority recurred through the century, with a new revolutionary upsurge in Bulgaria in the 1870s. In suppressing the revolt, the Turks used ruthless violence that appalled Western Europeans and stirred massive support for the Bulgarian cause. But Bulgaria had many Muslim occupants, who themselves suffered greatly at the hands of the rebels and of invading Russians. Estimates of the scale of destruction vary enormously, but a reasonable figure suggests that the number of Muslim dead ran into tens of thousands, with perhaps half a million forced to become refugees.

Another orgy of violence ensued during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, a complex affair of shifting alliances between several Christian powers against the Ottomans. Once again, religious massacres and purges became commonplace, while some Muslim communities were forcibly converted to Christianity. Albanian Muslims suffered dreadfully. An even-handed international commission investigating these atrocities declared that “it has become a competition, as to who can best dispossess and ‘denationalize’ his neighbor.”

The process of cleansing minorities culminated in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Between 1923 and 1925, Greece and Turkey arranged for the exchange of 1.3 million Greek refugees for 400,000 Turks then resident in Greece.

Religious violence was cumulative in nature. When Christians drove Muslims into exile in Turkey, those exiles naturally sought revenge on any local Christians they found. Those Christians in turn persecuted Muslims, and the spiral of hatred continued indefinitely. In 1915, Circassian exiles were major participants in the slaughter of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Of the triumvirate of Turkish leaders who masterminded the Armenian Genocide, all stemmed from regions in Bulgaria and Greece from which their families had been expelled. Exiles and expatriates often become the most ferocious superpatriots.

The fact of victimhood does not for a second excuse any of the evils perpetrated by the Ottomans or by any other group. The Armenian Genocide, like the Shoah, was an absolute and inexcusable evil. But looking at the broader historical picture, neither Christians nor Muslims can claim to be entirely blameless. Srebrenica was not a unique crime.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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Amen: A Prayer for the World,
featuring the work of Christina Saj (left) and Hisham El Zeiny (right)

The exhibit *Amen: A Prayer for the World* began in Cairo with the works of 30 Egyptian artists. By the time it traveled to St. John the Divine in New York, the collection represented 48 artists from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian traditions. The impetus for the exhibit came from CARAVAN, an organization that supports intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Each artist was given a life-size human form of fiberglass in a pose of prayer and encouraged to paint it. The result, says CARAVAN founder Paul-Gordon Chandler, is an “aspirational expression of hope and goodwill coming ‘out of Egypt’ for the peoples of the Middle East and the rest of the world.”

Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.

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